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3 [PAGE 54](#): Motion for the CFMC to explore options for permitting
4 and the relevant research on Fish Tracking Devices and to have a
5 presentation provided by the Council in 2026 that incorporates
6 feedback from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Department of
7 Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and NOAA on those
8 options. [The motion carried on page 57.](#)
9
- 10 [PAGE 77](#): Motion to accept the recommendation provided by the SSC
11 for ABC from SEDAR 91 for spiny lobster for Saint Thomas/Saint
12 John, and Saint Croix. [The motion carried on page 179.](#)
13
- 14 [PAGE 81](#): Motion to add to the agenda for the OEAP meeting a
15 request to look at how existing and new communication tools could
16 be applied in new ways to improve fishers' ability to engage in
17 Council decision-making at meetings and during public comment
18 periods. [The motion carried on page 81.](#)
19
- 20 [PAGE 161](#): Motion to allow each District Advisory Panel to choose
21 a local non-profit representative to their membership. [The motion](#)
22 [carried on page 162.](#)
23
- 24 [PAGE 165](#): Motion to appoint a recent MREP graduate to the second
25 remaining vacancy on the Saint Croix District Advisory Panel. The
26 Chair will have the authority to choose the graduate from a list
27 of names that NOAA Fisheries submits. [The motion carried on page](#)
28 [166.](#)
29
- 30 [PAGE 216](#): Move to rescind motion number nine: Motion to appoint
31 a recent MREP graduate to the second remaining vacancy on the Saint
32 Croix District Advisory Panel. The Chair will have the authority
33 to choose the graduate from a list of names that NOAA Fisheries
34 submits. [The motion carried on page 217.](#)

1 **CARIBBEAN FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**
2 **188th REGULAR Council MEETING**
3 **HYBRID MEETING**
4 **WESTIN INN BEACH RESORT AND SPA**
5 **SAINT THOMAS, U.S.V.I.**

6
7 DECEMBER 03-04, 2026
8

9 The Caribbean Fishery Management Council convened at the Westin
10 Inn Beach Resort and Spa in Saint Thomas, U.S.V.I. on Wednesday
11 morning, December 03, 2026, and was called to order at 9:08 A.M.
12 by the Council Chair, Carlos Farchette.
13

14 **CALL TO ORDER AND ROLL CALL**

15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Good morning, everyone. We're going to get
17 started, we're kind of running a little behind. So, if you all
18 can, grab your seats.
19

20 So good morning, everyone. Welcome to the one 188th Council Meeting
21 being held at the Westin Resort on Saint Thomas, U.S. Virgin
22 Islands. It is 9:08 A.M.
23

24 We are going to start with a roll call. We are going to start on
25 my left with Cristina.
26

27 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Good morning. Cristina Olán, Council
28 Staff. Buenos días.
29

30 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Buenos días. Good morning. Liajay Rivera
31 García, Council staff.
32

33 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Good morning. María López, NOAA Fisheries.
34

35 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Graciela García-Moliner, Council Staff.
36

37 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Good morning, Daniel Matos-Caraballo,
38 Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources.
39

40 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Good morning. Nicole Angeli, U.S. Virgin Islands
41 Division of Fish and Wildlife.
42

43 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Good morning. Tony Blanchard, Saint
44 Thomas, Councilman.
45

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

48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Miguel Rolón, Executive Director. I need to read

1 for the record that Ms. Heather Blough and María Del Mar López-
2 Mercer are the designees from the office of the Regional Office
3 for this meeting. So, I need to say it for the record.
4
5 **DIANA T. MARTINÓ NOGUERAS:** Diana Martinó, Council staff. Good
6 morning.
7
8 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Good morning. Buenos días, everyone. I'm Heather
9 Blough with NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office. I am very
10 happy and honored to be serving as Andy Strelcheck's designee at
11 this meeting. I've worked with some of you for many, many years
12 dating all the way back to the Council's 2005 Sustainable Fisheries
13 Act amendment and had the opportunity to work with many of the
14 U.S.V.I. fishermen on the Trap Reduction Program several years
15 ago. I'm looking forward to reengaging, reconnecting with folks,
16 and getting to know and work with those of you who I haven't yet
17 had the opportunity to work with.
18
19 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** Good morning. Anne Kersting, NOAA Office of
20 General Counsel.
21
22 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Good morning. Roberto Sabater, Council Member.
23
24 **SENNAI HABTES:** Morning, all. Sennai Habtes, U.S. Virgin Islands
25 Division Of Fish And Wildlife and the Ecosystems-Based Fisheries
26 Management Technical Advisory Panel Chair.
27
28 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Good morning, everyone. My name is Jannette
29 Ramos-García, Outreach and Education Advisory Panel Chair.
30
31 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yes. Good morning. This is Vance
32 Vicente, Scientific and Statistics Committee member and Chairman.
33
34 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Buenos días. Martha Prada, IRA
35 Coordinator.
36
37 **DANIELLE BLACKLOCK:** Good morning. Danielle Blacklock, Director of
38 the Office of Aquaculture at NOAA Fisheries.
39
40 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Good morning. Wilson Santiago, Puerto
41 Rico Fisheries Liaison.
42
43 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Good morning. James Kreglo, DAP Saint
44 Thomas/Saint John member.
45
46 **YADIRA SANCHEZ:** Hello. My name is Yadira Sanchez from Puerto Rico.
47
48 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julia Magras, DAP Chair, Saint Thomas/Saint John.

1 Good morning, everyone.
2
3 **NELSON CRESPO:** Good morning, everyone. Nelson Crespo, DAP Chair,
4 Puerto Rico.
5
6 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Good morning, all. Gerson Martínez, Saint Croix,
7 DAP Chair.
8
9 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Good morning. Sarah Stephenson, NOAA
10 Fisheries.
11
12 **MARÍA DE LOS A. IRIZARRY:** Good morning. María Irizarry, Council
13 Staff.
14
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** And online.
16
17 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** People in Zoom. James Butler, Kiara
18 Matías, Vanessa Ramírez, Nicole Greaux, Michael, Jose A. Rivera,
19 Ricardo López, Kevin McCarthy, Jesus Rivera-Hernández, John
20 Walter, Derek Soto, Acacia Holiday and Lauren Rensburg.
21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?
23
24 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. For the record, we want to excuse Vanessa
25 Ramírez for being here in person, she's a Vice-Chair, due to family
26 emergencies, but she will be with us on a voting capacity and
27 everything through the internet. You just heard her voice. But for
28 the record, that's the reason why she's not here in person.
29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you. I'll thank Graciela for reminding me
31 that I didn't mention the date for the meeting. It's December 3rd,
32 2025. Next, we have the swearing in of Tony Blanchard.

33 **SWEARING-IN AND RECOGNITIONS**

34
35
36 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Yeah.
37
38 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Very honored to welcome you back to the Council,
39 Tony. So, I'm going to read the first two lines here and then turn
40 it over to you to read the rest. "As trustees of the nation's
41 fishery resources, all voting members must take an oath specified
42 by the secretary as follows."
43
44 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** "I, Anthony Blanchard, as a duly
45 appointed member of a Regional Fishery Management Council
46 established under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and
47 Management Act, hereby promise to conserve and manage the living
48 marine resources of the United States of America by carrying out

1 the business of the Council for the greatest overall benefit of
2 the Nation.

3
4 I recognize my responsibility to serve as a knowledgeable and
5 experienced trustee of the Nation's marine fisheries resources,
6 being careful to balance competing private or regional interests,
7 and always aware and protective of the public interest in those
8 resources. I commit myself to uphold the provisions, standards,
9 and requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and
10 Management Act and other applicable law and shall conduct myself
11 at all times according to the rules of conduct prescribed by the
12 Secretary of Commerce.

13
14 This oath is given freely and without mental reservation or purpose
15 of evasion."

16
17 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you so much. Thanks for your willingness to
18 serve.

19
20 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Appreciate it.

21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Tony, and welcome back. We have
23 another person online whose name is not on the list here, but his
24 name is Michael Funk. He is a Fisheries Advisory Committee Member
25 from Saint Croix. He just has issues with his microphone so he
26 can't talk. Okay, Miguel.

27
28 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You know, Council work
29 is teamwork. I remember John Boardman, a member of the NOAA
30 Fisheries, a long time ago he told me, after going through all
31 seven Councils that this was not a Council meeting. It was mostly
32 a thanksgiving meeting with friends and family. That's the way we
33 think that we have been able to succeed in managing the fisheries
34 of the U.S. Caribbean.

35
36 Sometimes we take people for granted. You know, the Chairs of the
37 DAPs, Chair of the SSC, members of the Council, staff, staff from
38 the Council, María, Sarah. These people work really hard to make
39 things happen for the Council. But today-- they're going to kill
40 me for this. --but I want to ask-- where is Alberto? You're right.
41 Come over here, please.

42
43 Alberto is this guy that if everything goes fine, well, nobody
44 cares. But if the mic doesn't work, we all look at Alberto. "What
45 happened, Alberto?" He has been with us for some time now, and we
46 consider him a part of the Caribbean Council family. So, I'm going
47 to recognize you today, Alberto, for all your work, all your tears
48 yesterday. So, as they say in the army, thank you for your service.

1 I hope that you will be with us longer than I will be. Please talk
2 to Angie. She has some fiscal matters to talk to you about. And
3 thank you again for all your work. Yeah.

4
5 And the next one, she's going to really hate it, but anyway.
6 Cristina.

7
8 Okay. This is another person, again, that we take for granted
9 sometimes. But when we hired Cristina, she started working with
10 our social networks, everything that has to do with the Council
11 and the outside world. As you see, she's the one who runs the
12 meetings. She's the one who fetches the presentations and calls
13 you every time because usually the presentations or some people
14 come at the last minute. But she's there to help us with that. And
15 she has been with us for-- how many years now?

16
17 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** As an employee, for two.

18
19 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** But forever. Since the beginning.

20
21 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Since the OEAP, 2009.

22
23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yep. And she's always willing and able to help
24 everybody that needs help from us. And she's a partner of Jannette
25 Ramos when she was in Sea Grant, and Wilson. And anybody who needs
26 help communicating with the Council or getting information that we
27 need to send to the public. So, for that, we are really grateful.

28
29 We want to recognize you today. Thank you very much.

30
31 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Thank you.

32
33 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** A special award will be given to Cristina here
34 in recognition of her work is a token of appreciation for what you
35 do here for us. Thank you very much.

36
37 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Thank you very much.

38
39 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. You want to say something?

40
41 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Rapidito. Sí. I'm very thankful for
42 this recognition. I didn't expect that. Also, I want to say that
43 all that I do is just to serve and that goes to the community that
44 we are part of. So, I'm very thankful but also honored to be
45 serving. Ya tú sabes. Gracias.

46
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay, thank you. Thank you, Chairman.

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Miguel. Okay, next on the adoption
2 of the agenda, Liajay.

3
4 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**
5

6 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. We have a suggestion
7 on day two to eliminate the topic Upcoming SEDAR 103 Procedural
8 Workshop Updates as it will be covered at the Science Center topic,
9 today in the morning.

10
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?

12
13 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** We would also suggest that instead of
14 the agenda reading a letter sent to NOAA on the Executive Order.
15 We were expecting it to be the status of NOAA's response to the
16 CFMC's letter regarding Executive Order 14276, Restoring America's
17 Seafood Competitiveness. So, just to change in the heading.

18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

20
21 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes. On the second day, we are going to be
22 addressing mariculture at 09:30. It will be an hour for discussion,
23 but we want to stop sharp at 10:00. We will have a presentation by
24 Ana Salceda, she's in Spain, and it will be a presentation on the
25 Big Fish Campaign. Her presentation will be fifteen to twenty
26 minutes and then afterward we can continue talking about
27 mariculture if needed.

28
29 And then there will be a presentation by Danielle Blacklock and
30 then there will be another one following Danielle's from Dr. Cepeda
31 on the update of her work regarding permits that you need for
32 aquaculture in the U.S. Caribbean.

33
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Is that all we have for agenda updates?
35 Okay. So, we need a motion to accept the agenda as amended.

36
37 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Nicole Angeli, motion to accept the agenda as
38 amended.

39
40 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Second. Tony Blanchard.

41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, next is a consideration of the-- what?
43 Oh, I'm sorry. Yeah. Everybody. All in favor say, "aye."

44
45 **GROUP:** Aye.

46
47 **CONSIDERATION OF THE 187TH COUNCIL MEETING VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT**
48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion
2 carries.

3 So, consideration of the 187th Council meeting verbatim
4 transcriptions. I think we have yes. Anne?
5

6 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** It's Anne Kersting, for the record. On page 217
7 of the transcript, line 34, it says, "Sarah P. Stephenson," and it
8 should say "Anne Kersting" instead. And that's my only correction.
9

10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any other corrections to the transcript? Okay.
11 We need a motion to accept the verbatim transcript as amended.
12

13 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Motion to accept as amended.
14

15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I need a second. Second by Sabater. All in favor
16 say, "aye."
17

18 **GROUP:** Aye.
19

20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion
21 carries. Next, we have Miguel with the executive director's report.
22

23 **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

24

25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As you know, the eight
26 Councils and National Marine Fisheries Service are celebrating,
27 next year, the fiftieth anniversary of the Magnuson and Stevens
28 Act, and the implementation of Councils to help manage the
29 fisheries of The United States. As part of that event, each Council
30 will engage in activities that will celebrate this anniversary
31 along with the other eight Councils where we're going to have
32 activities at a national level to celebrate the fiftieth
33 anniversary. The CFMC will have a video that will include
34 experiences of the people who have been with us for many years.
35 Cristina and Diana, with the person in charge of photography here,
36 Rene, will interview some of the key people that have been with us
37 for all these years, Council members, staff, all, except Angie.
38 And we will then edit that video,
39

40 That will be for 2026, our contribution to the celebration of the
41 fiftieth anniversary. If you recall, when we celebrated the
42 fortieth anniversary, it was here in Saint Thomas. And the whole
43 celebration was put together with Diana here with the help of some
44 other people. So, this time, because of the budgetary constraint
45 and everything that we have, we have to rethink our activities for
46 next year.
47

48 So, we are going to take the opportunity to interview some of the

1 people that we have on the list with five easy questions. The
2 questions will be the same for everybody. Later then, Cristina and
3 I will have to sit down and go over it. And remember, if you have
4 five minutes for each person, and you have 10 people, that's fifty
5 minutes. And at the end, you have to reduce that to ten minutes,
6 no more than ten minutes.

7
8 So please, when you are approached by Cristina or Diana today, do
9 your best for cooperation. I guess, Nelson already hired a person
10 that will help you with the haircut and everything you said. So,
11 the key people that we have here include, of course, Council
12 members.

13
14 And then, next thing that I have is the budget. As you all know,
15 we have the closure, we have uncertainties with the budget. We
16 have enough to go through December 31st and start in January. After
17 that, if we don't get any more money, the Council, all the Councils
18 will suffer. Some of them will have to stop activities. We hope
19 that this will be solved before the end of the year.

20
21 I talked to Mr. Piñeiro, the assistant administrator for NOAA
22 Fisheries, and they are doing their best to assist so that we, all
23 eight Councils, receive the funding on time. Not only the Councils,
24 but the National Marine Fisheries Service, the Regional Office,
25 the Centers are also in need of having some, well, certain levels
26 of budgets so they can continue operating. So, that's something
27 that may affect us.

28
29 But one thing that we would like to do is to continue some of the
30 key projects that we have. For example, for next year we will have
31 in-person meetings with each one of the DAPs. We will visit Saint
32 Thomas, Saint Croix and Puerto Rico. That's something that I
33 discussed with the Chairs before, because it's important to
34 communicate effectively with members of the DAPs. Remember,
35 sometimes you learn more at the coffee break than at the meeting
36 itself. That will be something that we budget for it.

37
38 The other thing that we budget is the aquaculture workshop. We
39 will hear more about it tomorrow. That's it for the budget, Mr.
40 Chairman, so far. As soon as we have some more information before
41 the end of this month, we will communicate with you and let you
42 know what will happen in 2026.

43
44 The Big Fish campaign, this is probably the last year because we
45 ran out of money, and we have one more country to visit with the
46 money that we had before. So, we are working with the CRFM, the
47 Caribbean Community, CARICOM, the Caribbean Regional Fisheries
48 Mechanism that encompasses 17 countries, nine members and other

1 observers. That will be the last part of the Big Fish Campaign.
2 You will hear about it tomorrow when we get the presentation from
3 Ana Salceda.

4
5 The Big Fish Campaign is instrumental for the protection of fish
6 that aggregate to spawn. We all know that some snappers, some
7 groupers, and other species of fish aggregate to spawn, and they
8 become very vulnerable to overfishing. So, we have been able, with
9 this campaign, to engage the fishers from each country that
10 participates. The idea is to have a bottom-up approach rather than
11 the other way around which has been the traditional way of
12 operating, and it had been a success story. Each country that we
13 have visited, especially because of Ana Salceda, has implemented
14 measures to manage the fishery in a way that will protect the fish
15 aggregations in each one of the countries.

16
17 So, that's what we have so far, Mr. Chairman, at this time. I need
18 to reiterate also that, in our case, we kept the liaisons funded
19 for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. That includes Saint
20 Thomas and Saint Croix and Saint John, of course. So, I was allowed
21 to keep that in our budgets. So, we hope that that won't suffer.
22 It's not a great amount of money, but it's important to assist the
23 local government in engaging with the Council's activities that we
24 have.

25
26 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

27 28 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Miguel. Any questions for Miguel?
31 Nicole?

32
33 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Hi, good morning. Nicole Angeli, U.S. Virgin
34 Islands. Thank you so much for the report. I was wondering if we
35 would have the opportunity to review this on paper. I was unable
36 to take good notes about the information that you just submitted.

37
38 And also, I did want to impress upon everyone that the amount of
39 money that we get for our liaison funds for the CFMC are actually
40 only one of two dedicated forms of funding that we get at all, for
41 the commercial fishery. It is critically important for those funds
42 to still be available to us and we appreciate it.

43
44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. Mr. Chairman. Sorry, I forgot about this.
45 When I participated at the thirty-six legislature of the U.S.
46 Virgin Islands. I was asked to present, following a questionnaire
47 from the legislators, the activities the Council has and issues
48 that the Council deals with here. I was assisted by Graciela

1 García-Moliner. Actually, she was present there and Dr. Angeli as
2 well, at that session.

3
4 I need to recognize Angeli because I have been in that position.
5 She was all by herself presenting every information that we have
6 to hear from the division. And one aspect of the discussion was
7 the intention of some legislators to promote mariculture in the
8 U.S. Caribbean. I talked afterwards with a Senate member; he will
9 be invited to the workshop next year. Next year we have elections,
10 some changes may happen there.

11
12 They are interested in pursuing a mariculture project in the U.S.
13 Virgin Islands. This is right on time. You will see tomorrow when
14 we talk about this workshop next year. They are expecting to be
15 invited.

16
17 Dr. Sennai Habtes will also be there. He has been working in the
18 Virgin Islands, in the past, with aquaculture projects. The
19 president of the committee told me that they may call me again
20 next year, if need be, to add more information about what the
21 Council does, etcetera. I believe that this interest by legislators
22 of the Virgin Islands in Mariculture will provide some positive
23 results in years to come.

24
25 Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Sorry for forgetting about it.

26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** No problem. Any more questions for Miguel? Okay.
28 Hearing none, we're going to move on to the fishery amendment plans
29 of Fishery Management Plans Amendments, Actions and Priorities
30 Update for 2026. María López-Mercer

31
32 **FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLANS AMENDMENTS, ACTIONS AND PRIORITIES**
33 **UPDATE FOR 2026 - MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER, NOAA FISHERIES/SERO**

34
35 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Good morning, everybody. This is María López
36 with NOAA Fisheries, Caribbean Branch. As usual, we are going to
37 start the meeting giving an update on where we are with all the
38 actions that the Council has been working on during the past year,
39 the status of actions that the Council is currently pursuing. And
40 then we're also going to talk about the priorities or other
41 projects that the Council was interested in discussing in 2026 and
42 additional topics that the Council started discussing during the
43 August meeting. You can go to the next slide.

44
45 Okay. First, this first slide has a list of all the regulatory
46 actions that NMFS and NOAA Fisheries have been working with after
47 the Council took final action on these ones. So, this is a summary
48 of where we are, the status of these actions right now.

1
2 So, Amendment 2 to all the Fishery Management Plans. This is the
3 trawl, net gear, and descending devices. The notice of availability
4 of the amendment was published during the same period of the August
5 Council meeting. Then in September 2025, there was a proposed rule
6 that was published. And then in October, the final rule was
7 published. On November 3rd, 2025, the rule implementing this
8 amendment became effective, except that the descending device
9 requirement that was also included in this amendment and in this
10 final rule will become effective on April 1st, 2026. The Council
11 and NMFS chose to do that because they wanted to provide time for
12 the Council to continue their outreach and education activities on
13 the descending devices and all the activities that they have
14 planned to inform about this requirement and promote best fishing
15 practices through the use of the descending devices.

16
17 So, the other action that-- the regulatory action that NMFS is
18 currently working on is Framework 3 to the U.S. Virgin Islands
19 Fishery Management Plans. This is the action that established the
20 management reference points that came from SEDAR 80 for the queen
21 triggerfish in Saint Thomas/Saint John, and in Saint Croix. The
22 proposed rule published in October. The comment period ended in
23 November. And right now, NMFS is developing the final rule. We
24 will be informing, through fishery bulletins and through the
25 Council website and NOAA Fisheries' website when that final rule
26 is published and the effective date.

27
28 Amendment 4 to the Puerto Rico FMP is the reclassification of the
29 rainbow runner as a pelagic species. Right now, we are working on
30 the proposed rule. We're developing that proposed rule and when
31 the amendment is available for comment and that proposed rule, we
32 will be publishing a fishery bulletin, and it will be informed in
33 the Council webpage and in NOAA Fisheries' webpage so the public
34 can comment on the amendment and in the proposed rule.

35
36 So, that's where we are right now for those actions. As a reminder,
37 size limits for all harvest of dolphin and wahoo are in place.
38 That became effective earlier this year. Recreational bag limits
39 for dolphin and wahoo in federal waters are also in place. The
40 prohibition on the use of nets, except for the specific gillnet
41 for certain species as specified in the regulations, in federal
42 waters is also in place. This is what I mentioned earlier, the
43 Amendment 2 to all the FMPs.

44
45 And as I mentioned earlier, the descending device requirement will
46 be in place on April 1st, 2026. And as usual, thank you to everyone,
47 all the fishers that are already using those devices. Okay, we can
48 go to the next slide.

1
2 Okay, this slide is going to be showing all the actions that the
3 Council is currently working on and the ones that are going to be
4 discussed during this meeting or in future meetings.

5
6 Okay, let's start with modification of pelagic accountability
7 measures. If you see from this slide, we decided to add a column
8 on information on why is the Council taking this action, why is it
9 important? So, this modification of pelagic accountability
10 measures is an action that we started discussing during the past
11 August 2025 meeting. And the reason that the Council needs to do
12 something about it is because right now the accountability measures
13 that are established for pelagic species, which as all of you know,
14 are new to federal management under the fisher management plans,
15 do not specify a corrective action to take if there is an overage
16 or an exceedance of the ACL. So, that corrective action needs to
17 be taken to prevent the ACL from being exceeded again in the next
18 year.

19
20 So, we started the discussion about that, and we will continue
21 that discussion during the, I think, I believe this afternoon. So,
22 during this meeting, in the August meeting, we presented some
23 draft, very draft options for the Council to discuss. The idea was
24 for the Council to give input to staff, to find out what are the
25 things that could be considered and there was a motion for the
26 creation of an interdisciplinary planning team to start working on
27 these options.

28
29 So, during September, the IPT or a smaller working group started
30 discussing it. We started like brainstorming ideas on how to deal
31 with this particular accountability measure, which as you all know,
32 and as we discussed during the August meeting, is very different
33 than the reef fish, right? These are pelagic species, they are
34 seasonal species, they can come in pulses, they have trends. The
35 harvest. We also discussed that the harvest of species in the
36 Caribbean is just a small portion of the wider availability of
37 fish or what is being harvested in the whole entire Caribbean. So,
38 there was a lot of discussion about that.

39
40 So, what we would like to do during this meeting, and we'll talk
41 about that later, is to review some of the things that we will
42 discuss in this working group. And what we want to focus more on
43 is that AM trigger. What is the evaluation that we could do to the
44 landings to determine, for example, if there are trends, how the
45 landings could be methodically evaluated when they exceed the ACL?

46
47 We are also going to be looking for the Council to provide ideas,
48 and we can talk about that a little bit more later. But if you can

1 start thinking about how to address this issue, because this is a
2 requirement for management, then we can talk about that later. So,
3 the plan would be, as I said, discussing options during this
4 meeting, draft options, potential options, and then bring this
5 back to the working group to refine those options, and then bring
6 an options paper for the Council to look at in April.

7
8 The next action that the Council already started working with is
9 the review of stocks in need of conservation and management. This
10 is what is also known as the matrix. The Council set that, in
11 August 2025, as priority number one. The reason that the Council
12 is pursuing this is because there's a need to maximize management
13 efficiency and is also something that can be taken under the
14 Executive Order for seafood. The seafood E.O. 14276, I'm sorry.

15
16 So, during the August meeting, Sarah Stephenson from NOAA Fisheries
17 gave a presentation on what the matrix is. The matrix is basically,
18 includes the species that we are managing and the data that we
19 have available on those species. That mostly comes from the data
20 triage that the Science Center has been developing during these
21 past years and many other things of information that is available
22 for the species, but also is an evaluation and a presentation for
23 criteria that the Council used to decide what stocks were going to
24 be managed under the current FMPs, but also using the guidance
25 from the Magnuson and Stevens Act from the National Standards,
26 what are the criteria that we need to follow, the Council needs to
27 follow to determine if a particular species is in need of
28 conservation and management.

29
30 So, the idea here would be for the Council to look at different
31 criteria, perhaps, if they're interested, that could be used to
32 again maximize management efficiency. If there are species that
33 could be removed from management, because perhaps they are not
34 covered under any of those criteria. If there are species that are
35 not in a targeted directly on a fishery that could perhaps be moved
36 to an ecosystem component species under the FMPs because of the
37 role they have in the ecosystem, meaning that these species are
38 not going to be directly managed, like for example, with annual
39 catch limits or accountability measures, but they will be included
40 in the plan for basically keeping an eye on them and taking some
41 actions to protect the role in the ecosystem.

42
43 So, Sarah Stephenson will be providing, at this meeting, a
44 discussion on some of those preliminary options. They were able,
45 as you know, the federal government was closed for six weeks. So,
46 there's some things that we wanted to accomplish during this month
47 after the August meeting. However, we were able to have some
48 discussions, and this is what we're going to be talking about today

1 with you, trying to get input from the Council. And then, after
2 that, plan is for the working group to work on refining those
3 options. And again, also similar to the accountability measures
4 for pelagics, just bringing the idea if the Council is agreeable
5 to that review and options paper during the April meeting.

6
7 The next topic is the SEDAR 91 spiny lobster. This is starting the
8 assessments, update assessments that were done for a spiny lobster
9 in Saint Croix and in Saint Thomas and Saint John. Why? Because
10 their assessment was updated and ultimately it will result in a
11 revision of the ACLs for the spiny lobster in both of those
12 islands. So, in August 2025, the period on that time, the Council
13 received an update on where we were on the SEDAR 91, and there was
14 a motion that was passed by the Council to develop amendments, of
15 course, pending the SSC review that was going to happen in
16 September. So, that SSC review happened in September, and the SSC
17 accepted SEDAR 91, for each one of the islands, adequate for giving
18 management advice and best available science.

19
20 So, during this Council meeting, the SSC will discuss their
21 recommendations. The Council will be selecting their P*, their
22 probabilities for the uncertainty. And then, they can also choose
23 to provide options for the staff to work with and include in an
24 amendment, in a framework action for developing ACLs, of course,
25 if the Council votes to accept the recommendation from the SSC for
26 the acceptable biological catch.

27
28 So, the plan would be if the Council passes a motion to do that,
29 then staff can begin work on a framework action or to implement
30 these new ACLs that would come from this assessment. And then, the
31 idea will be in April 2026 for the Council to select preferred
32 alternatives, and we'll move forward.

33
34 We'll talk about SEDAR 91 for spiny lobster on the next slide for
35 Puerto Rico. So, SEDAR 84, which is a yellowtail snapper in Puerto
36 Rico and in Saint Thomas/Saint John, and for stoplight parrotfish
37 in Saint Croix. This is because there were stock assessments for
38 this species and ultimately will result, if accepted, in a revision
39 of the ACLs for all the species on specific islands. So, during
40 the August meeting period, around the August meetings there was a
41 review panel and there was also an overview report that was
42 provided at that time.

43
44 The SSC had a preliminary review and there's some actions that the
45 Science Center did, I believe, and Kevin McCarthy from the Science
46 Center will be providing some information about this in his
47 participation later this morning. So, the idea for this one, as I
48 said in December, in this meeting, is we're going to get those

1 updates on where the process is with regard to these assessments.
2 And then as you can see, don't have anything listed in here for
3 the next months because that will be depending on the guidance
4 that is provided by the Science Center and the SSC during their
5 discussion.

6
7 Okay, next slide. Okay, SEDAR 91 for spiny lobster for Puerto Rico.
8 During the August meeting, there was a motion to develop the
9 amendments, of course, pending revision of SEDAR 91 and their
10 outcomes. There were some concerns that were raised by the, and
11 this is a summary of what was discussed during the past meeting,
12 by Puerto Rico DNER about the assessment, and there were some
13 recommendations that were made to the Science Center to include
14 some additional information regarding some fishery dependent
15 information in the assessment. So, right now the staff of the
16 Science Center is working with Puerto Rico DNER to incorporate the
17 information that was requested.

18
19 So, during this meeting, we're going to get an update from the
20 Science Center on those revisions. And also, this is going to be
21 pending, SEDAR 91 is pending a review from the SSC and then we'll
22 be informed during SSC participation in this meeting as to when
23 that will happen. The Council has to schedule that meeting, so
24 we'll get more information about that. And as you can see, for the
25 rest of the year, at least until April, it's in blank because we're
26 going to be filling those out depending on the guidance provided
27 by the Council.

28
29 Okay, and then in the next slide-- the next slide, sorry. The next
30 topic is revision of accountability measures for Puerto Rico spiny
31 lobster. Again, this is something that we discussed during the
32 past Council meeting which is also going to be pending the outcomes
33 from SEDAR 91. So, it's kind of on hold until this process that is
34 all related comes through.

35
36 Okay, so lastly, I wanted to bring to the Council's attention a
37 prioritized list of actions to NMFS on E.O. 14276. This is
38 something that the Council will be discussing later, I believe
39 tomorrow. There was a list of priorities that were provided to
40 NOAA Fisheries that the Council would like to focus on. Some of
41 the topics that the Council discussed which could be prioritized,
42 that the Council could start working on, could be, for example,
43 revising incompatible regulations between territorial and federal
44 waters. There's some work that has been ongoing. For example, the
45 U.S. Virgin Islands have reviewed some of their regulations and,
46 Nicole, correct me if I'm wrong, my understanding is that you also
47 incorporated the minimum size limit for the yellowtail snapper,
48 which is compatible with Federal Waters. We have that 12-inches

1 size limit on the yellowtail snapper. And also, the U.S. Virgin
2 Islands also prohibited the harvest of the sea cucumbers, sea
3 urchins, or is that on the works?
4

5 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** That's on the works.
6

7 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** That's on the works, sorry. So, that's
8 something that's on the work. So, the good thing about this is
9 that this is things that we have been working, the U.S. Virgin
10 Islands and Puerto Rico, they have been working for some time on
11 identifying those regulations that are incompatible, right? And we
12 still have to do, at the federal level, we already identified some
13 of those regulations. So, one suggestion for the Council will be
14 to look at some of these regulations that are not compatible at
15 our side and see if there's anything that the Council would like
16 to pursue, that the staff and guide staff, task staff to begin
17 working on. So, I believe there's a list of regulations that maybe
18 we can share with you Council members to see if there's anything
19 that you would like us to start pursuing during 2026 and maybe we
20 can go back to that tomorrow. I want to thank the U.S. Virgin
21 Islands for being so proactive in revising regulations and
22 discussing with us. Thank you very much.
23

24 So, the plan for this one is when ready and when there's
25 availability, because I know that at the end of the year, it's
26 kind of very-- there's a lot going on, right, we can continue these
27 discussions to see what the needs are, additional needs for making
28 changes to the regulations so we can bring that to the Council's
29 attention.
30

31 Okay, so the other thing that the Council discussed is a revision
32 of duplicative regulations in federal waters. That's another item
33 that we can suggest for the Council to take a look at what things,
34 what specific actions they would like to pursue that they can task
35 staff to start looking into. For example, there were talks about,
36 perhaps, duplication of seasonal closures with some area closures
37 or some regulations that may be duplicated, there may be something
38 else that is already addressing that. So, we can certainly have
39 some more discussions, but if there's things that maybe can be
40 done quicker, that will be something that we could be looking into
41 as well as part of these priorities.
42

43 There was also some talk about exploring carryover of new ACLs,
44 and this is a topic that we can certainly talk about in the future
45 and explore a little bit more. The feasibility of this for
46 particular situations here in the Caribbean, that's something that
47 we can take a look at.
48

1 There's also SEDAR 103. SEDAR 103 is the U.S. Caribbean application
2 of alternative assessment methods, and this is something that the
3 Science Center is going to be leading in 2026. They're looking for
4 alternative assessment approaches and that could end up being more
5 efficient and a little bit better for the type of data that we
6 have in our fisheries. That's something that was also included as
7 a priority and it is ongoing. And then, the idea here will also be
8 for the Council to provide input on other things that they would
9 like to pursue. Not necessarily that they may be all included at
10 this point under that list of priorities for NOAA Fisheries, but
11 maybe thinking about some specific actions that the Council would
12 like to pursue in 2026. And then as we have done during the past
13 Council meetings, tomorrow, perhaps at the end of the day, Council
14 can come with a revised list of priorities for the staff to focus
15 on.

16
17 Okay, I think this is all I have. There's going to be discussions
18 for the AM for pelagics later on, the matrix later on, and then
19 all of the information about the SEDARs later on today. I believe
20 these duplicative regulations or incompatible regulations or other
21 list of actions that were included in the response to NOAA
22 Fisheries will be discussed tomorrow.

23
24 So, this concludes my update. If you have any questions, I will be
25 happy to address them.

26
27 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

28
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, María. Graciela?

30
31 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, this is not a question, Mr. Chair,
32 but in addition to everything that María presented, the Council
33 also needs to be thinking about the essential fish habitat five-
34 year review. The Island-Based FMP started the clock. So, we put
35 everything that we knew about the new species in there, but the
36 review has to be done every five years. 2026 begins the clock to
37 meet the deadline of 2027.

38
39 The EFH review, for the Council, is funding dependent. So, we are
40 preparing a budget to see where we will be seeking that funding to
41 come to the Council for a contract for the update of the essential
42 fish habitat for all the species under management. Now since you
43 are discussing the matrix and you are discussing SEDAR 103, that
44 might change the number of species that we have to deal with in
45 terms of reviewing the EFH. So, considering all the pieces of the
46 puzzle put together, we need to start thinking about where funding
47 will be available to do the EFH review. Thank you.

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?
2

3 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Graciela, for that note. Graciela has
4 been talking about the experiences before. Every five years we
5 have to do this, and it costs around \$150,000 or more and we don't
6 have a penny for that. However, by law, we are required to have
7 that assessment every five years. So, we will write a note somehow
8 after this meeting to the appropriate people and see if we can
9 secure some extra funding to comply with that requirement.

10
11 And as María mentioned, when we talk about duplicative species
12 that we want to reduce the number, although we have to do it
13 anyway, it will be, as she mentioned, and this is important to say
14 it for the record, part of the compliance with the Order 14276.
15 So, tomorrow, between here and tomorrow, if you have any question
16 for María or Graciela, this is the time, so we can leave this
17 meeting with an order of priorities that the Council would like to
18 pursue in 2026.

19
20 And remember, we cannot do everything at the same time, but that
21 priority list is very important, so that the staff can then address
22 those with the appropriate people and time. Thank you, Mr.
23 Chairman.

24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any other questions for María? I have one. You
26 mentioned compatibility discussions. Are we going to start this
27 hopefully in '26? Is that what we're saying?

28
29 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, the thing with
30 compatibility is that there is a list of regulations that may not
31 be compatible, right, between either, you know, on our side,
32 federal with the state or vice-versa, right? And so, we could
33 start, the Council, if there's any specific actions under this
34 list of things that are not compatible that the Council would like
35 to start working on, that can certainly be included as a priority
36 for 2026.

37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, I know that our fisheries committee worked
39 with Sennai quite extensively on prioritizing that listing of what
40 we thought were easy ones. Some of them are more challenging. And
41 so, I don't know. Sennai, how can we jump start this process? I
42 know that we did that list at the FAC, and we prioritized it from
43 one to whatever it was, one to four I think.

44
45 **SENNAI HABTES:** You're talking about compatible regulations?

46
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Right. Right.

48

1 **SENNAI HABTES:** I mean, we're already doing it. There's no jump
2 starting. It takes time. Right? So, we've already identified the
3 ones that you, both FACs have prioritized.

4
5 I've already identified the most expedient route to getting them
6 put into legislation, whether it be through a commissioner
7 declaration or it needs to go through a change to the V.I. code or
8 it needs to be something that we can pass through other regulations
9 that we're doing through promulgation, the executive loan. All of
10 those are in process. We're choosing to move forward first with
11 the ones that can be done through commissioner declaration.

12
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Right.

14
15 **SENNAI HABTES:** And as we get them drafted, we bring them to you
16 for review with FACs.

17
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Mhmm.

19
20 **SENNAI HABTES:** And then we move forward to processing them. The
21 federal ones, those we've set the list with also your
22 recommendations to NMFS SERO. María's reviewing those. I think as
23 time moves forward, they will be brought to the Council for review
24 if there are ways that those regulations can be managed. To my
25 knowledge, there were maybe only two or three that required-- there
26 were two that require federal action. So, I think they're reviewing
27 those now to see what the process would be for them.

28
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, it's like what we just did with the
30 yellowtail and what we're doing with the sea urchins, cucumbers,
31 blah blah?

32
33 **SENNAI HABTES:** Correct. That is the process we're going through
34 currently.

35
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I got Andy and then Heather. Andy?

37
38 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Can you hear me okay?

39
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.

41
42 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Great. Good to see everyone. Sorry. I can't be
43 there in person. Two things with regard to the priorities.

44
45 So, I couldn't hear Sennai, but certainly we want to work with
46 U.S.V.I. and Puerto Rico on alignment of compatible regulations.
47 I think this will go nicely with the work we're doing on the matrix
48 and determining what species are in need of conservation and

1 federal management. And so, looking at obviously the regulations
2 for consistency, but also in alignment with what the territories
3 are doing to manage various species relative to federal fisheries.
4

5 And then in terms of the comments about the five-year review, we'll
6 have to look obviously at kind of our requirements for five-year
7 reviews. I will say given the reductions in staffing within the
8 government; conversations we've been having across our entire
9 habitat program is that five-year reviews would be deemed lower
10 priority for work. So, I think we would want to go back and look
11 carefully at kind of what was done five years ago, whether or not
12 that could be kind of sufficient moving forward and whether there's
13 a need to conduct that five-year review imminently versus kind of
14 delaying that over a longer period of time just given resourcing
15 issues like Miguel talked about. Thanks.

16

17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Andy. Heather?

18

19 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. Andy covered some of what I
20 was going to bring up. Also, I'm hoping that tomorrow during the
21 E.O. discussion, we can look more fully at the list that Graciela
22 had circulated, the list the Council has submitted to NMFS and
23 take a little bit of time to prioritize those. There are a lot of
24 actions on there. And then, maybe drill down into some of them,
25 like the duplicative regulations compatibility and those issues
26 that seem to continue to rise to the top of the pile and see if we
27 can add a little bit more detail and structure around what those
28 could look like.

29

30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?

31

32 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, this is a different comment, but I just wanted
33 to go back to the prioritized list of actions on the E.O. 14276.
34 I would really like to see the Council try and coincide additional
35 things that we're doing regarding if we move forward with the list
36 of actions. Can we please take a look at the strategic plan and
37 the priorities that we've identified and see how the things that
38 we've said are priorities, going forward to 2026, coincide with
39 these list of actions; and identify the things that we say are the
40 most important things that we want to do and how they align with
41 this list of actions that we're moving forward.

42

43 Otherwise, what we're continually doing is identifying more and
44 more priorities with more and more dwindling resources, and it
45 makes it impossible for us to get anything done other than say
46 we're going to do something. And so, I think it's really important
47 that if we identify things that we're moving towards, they fit
48 into the strategic plan that we've already identified, or we don't

1 do it because otherwise nothing gets done.
2
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?
4
5 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras, for the record. So, listen to
6 this compatibility discussion here from our earlier conversation
7 that we had, Miguel, 2026 DAP meetings. I would like to request
8 from now that if we can see a presentation from both the federal
9 and local government about what we are working on so we can have
10 a discussion with our teams. I think it would clear the air instead
11 of a surprise being out there.
12
13 I know a lot of us played part of the local discussion a few years
14 back with Sennai and Dr. Angeli and her team, but it would be good
15 to see exactly what's actually taking place right now, so we could
16 all have an idea, and maybe we might have a little extra input
17 that we would like to suggest. Thank you.
18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?
20
21 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Julian. Just to clarify. Your
22 request is to provide, like, for example, a list of all those
23 regulations that are incompatible? Is that what you're saying?
24
25 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yes. From what is compatible and what we are
26 looking at doing compatible.
27
28 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yes. What needs to be done. Yeah. Yeah.
29 Absolutely.
30
31 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Thank you.
32
33 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. We can certainly put that together.
34 That was kind of the plan. Obviously, you know, we were not able
35 to accomplish many of the things that we wanted to bring for this
36 meeting due to the furlough, but that's the plan. Absolutely.
37 Because we want the Council to take a look at these regulations
38 and maybe make some decisions as to what they would like staff to
39 start looking into for presentations. So, we'll definitely put
40 something together as soon as possible and share it. Thank you for
41 that.
42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?
44
45 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. So, I'm sure for any federal ones that will
46 come through review at the Council, and so, that will be presented
47 as any rule changes or regulations that are promulgated. From the
48 territorial side, let me know the next time you have a DAP meeting

1 either in Saint Thomas or Saint Croix, and I will happily come and
2 give you a presentation on that.

3

4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

5

6 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Just to, you know, perhaps close the topic,
7 at least on my end, just to remind you. Yes, like Sennai said, any
8 need for any changes to our regulations will go through the normal
9 process, through the Council process, discussion, the Council
10 voting, there's document that will be prepared that will evaluate
11 all the environmental effects that any action the Council would
12 like to pursue would have on the economy, on the social
13 environment, on the biology of any of the species that will be
14 affected, the physical environment, etcetera.

15

16 So, it will just go through a regular amendment process. This is
17 something that will come from the actual Council. So, there's
18 plenty of opportunities to comment. And of course, they're not all
19 regulations, they're regulations that were put in place for a
20 reason, of course, all of them. So, there needs to be an evaluation
21 about the need for revising those regulations more than just to be
22 compatible, right? There has to be an evaluation of what is the
23 need for making that change and it has to make sense for everybody.
24 Just wanted to clarify that.

25

26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?

27

28 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, on that note, two things. One, we
29 will request from the local government as soon as you have the
30 proclamation of the commissioner or the regulation that's made it
31 into the books to send it to us. We do have newspaper articles
32 where it says that yellowtail will have a size limit. So, we do
33 request that, so that the comparison can be made law to law rather
34 than the information that's available.

35

36 And secondly, there are two things. One, that's enforcement and
37 the other one is the Science Center and the need for the monitoring
38 of the regulations that we put in place. So, if we're thinking
39 about compatibility from the shore to the 200 nautical miles, then
40 you need to think in terms of the monitoring of these regulations
41 to see if they're working or not, if we need to change them. And
42 secondly, the enforcement of those regulations that will become
43 part of the fisher's daily life. So, those two things, you know,
44 do have to come hand in hand when we're talking about that topic
45 of compatibility or duplicity of regulations. Thank you.

46

47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So-- Heather? I'll wait.

48

1 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay. I was just going to speak to Sennai's point
2 about the strategic plan. Wondering if it's possible to share that
3 before the E.O. 14276 prioritization conversation tomorrow?
4

5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We have the five-year strategic plan. Yeah, we
6 can share that.
7

8 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** It might be helpful to do that crosswalk if we
9 are trying to prioritize. Okay, thanks.
10

11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** ¿Tú lo tienes, Graciela?
12

13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?
14

15 **SENNAI HABTES:** Just so everyone's aware, it's publicly available
16 on the website. Everything's on there. So, if you just go to the
17 CFMC, anyone can just look up the strategic plan.
18

19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?
20

21 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, a couple of
22 things. So, they are available. It's available on our website, but
23 I'll send a copy around.
24

25 And secondly, it's not only what's in the strategic plan, but it's
26 also what the SSC considers and has made recommendations to the
27 Council of things that we need to pursue in order to really assess
28 or really have a good handle on what we're doing. So, those
29 recommendations come forth from the SEDAR process to the SSC, from
30 the SSC to the Council. So, we do have not only one place that we
31 grab this information from its talking to the Regional Office,
32 talking to the Science Center for the one commonality that we have,
33 and that's, you know, making sure that we have sustainable
34 fisheries in the U.S. Caribbean.
35

36 So, the SSC already kind of gave us their blessing in terms of
37 what's there. It covers everything that we've been talking about
38 for a long time. And they are ranked in the letter that was sent
39 to Mr. Piñeiro. So, we need to, and as María said and Heather and
40 Sennai, we need to really narrow it down in terms of the work that
41 the staff can do. And the staff from the Regional Office and the
42 staff from the Science Center can actually do to provide you with
43 the outcome, a successful outcome. In addition to that, we do have
44 to keep a timeline that is required for the amendments and the
45 framework approach to changing management, etcetera. So, it's many
46 places that we have to look at. So, we'll try we try to do that
47 with that table that we provided.
48

1 So, I'll leave that as is right now. Thank you.
2

3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I just wanted to mention because I just
4 want a little clarity. Sennai, when the FAC sat down on Saint Croix
5 and prioritized the list for compatible, what we want to go ahead
6 and accept as what's going on for our waters and we submitted what
7 we would learn from the FADs, which is only a few for two, okay,
8 I think, recreational harvest for queen conch is one of them or
9 something like that. Because they got three, we got six.

10
11 So, what Julian was saying, that list that we did, is that the
12 list that Julian wants the DAP to review? Is that what you're
13 talking about?

14
15 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yes.

16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Miguel?

18
19 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So. The five-year strategic plan ends 2026 along
20 with the other plan that we mentioned before, Essential Fish
21 Habitat, this strategic plan could be amended. But we don't need
22 to do that. Actually, the idea of that strategic plan was to focus
23 on the things that the Council could do. So, 2026 is an important
24 time where we're going to address the strategic plan and the
25 concerns that we have and the modification that we need to have in
26 the strategic plan.

27
28 Also, we need to continue it for another five years. It's just a
29 matter of changing the data and updating what needs to be updated,
30 and we will have a viable strategic plan for the next five years.

31
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** When it comes to the executive order, we, the
33 DAPs, submitted their input as to what they felt should be managed
34 and what should be put in an ecosystem-based plan. But those
35 species are going to be separated and still be managed, right?
36 They're not just put aside and not managed. They're still managed
37 on the ecosystem. Miguel?

38
39 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** María, you want to go?

40
41 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Miguel. So, the recommendations
42 that the DAP made on the species that they would like to keep or
43 move, that will be part of the process that NMFS and the Council
44 are currently discussing for the matrix. There is a process that
45 has to be followed. Some of those species may fall under those
46 criteria. So, that's for evaluation.

47
48 Of course, all the input that is provided by the DAPs, all the

1 input that is provided in the public comments that come from here,
2 everything like that will be incorporated into the process, right?
3 But as Sarah will discuss when she does her presentation later
4 today, there's criteria that the same way that we did to decide
5 what we're currently managing. We have to follow those criteria to
6 make that decision as to what species are in need of conservation
7 and management. So, the question for the Council would be what
8 criteria from that guidance that is provided by the national
9 standards, what criteria would you like to use to refine your list
10 of species that you are managing right now and to move, right? So,
11 I think the input that is provided by the DAP can be part of and
12 it's expected to be part of those discussions that the Council
13 will be having. But there's a process that needs to be followed
14 and that's what Sarah has been working on and she will be
15 presenting.

16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

18
19 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We also need to separate 14276 from what we're
20 doing. Without the 14276, we still have to do that. Actually, we
21 started some years ago. So, we are lucky that they asked for the
22 same thing that we are doing now.

23
24 Meaning that the actions that the Council are taking now are our
25 response to the directive that we received from the National Marine
26 Fisheries Service. We cannot move any of the species without
27 modifying the management plan. In order for you to modify
28 management plan it takes about one year to three years. That's
29 something that we have to keep in mind.

30
31 For the DAPs, they already engaged in the discussion on July, but
32 we are going to address that at each one of the DAPs and of course
33 the SSC and the DAP at the same time. Meaning that after December
34 15th, we might have some other directive from National Marine
35 Fisheries Service regarding the compliance with 14276. But
36 whatever they tell us to do, or everything is a little bit separate
37 from the work that we have been doing now.

38
39 The key will be to follow SERO and Council staff. In the
40 presentation from Sarah tomorrow you will see where we are and the
41 things that we need to do.

42
43 María, from this Council meeting, do we need to give some guidance
44 specific to some action, or just give an idea of where we want to
45 go and then for the following meeting, we take more action? In
46 other words, do we need a definite answer from the Council at this
47 time?

48

1 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Are you referring to the process for
2 determining the need of conservation of species? No. So, when we
3 do the presentation a little bit later, we go on some of the draft
4 options. The idea would be for the Council to provide input as to
5 where do they want to be moved to, like in terms of the criteria,
6 new criteria that could be proposed. And then the idea will be for
7 staff, the IPT, to work on those options and refine the options.
8 And for the April meeting, bring a draft of options paper. So, we
9 are very early in the process here. But thank you for the question.

10
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, Mr. Chairman, that's the key to this meeting.
12 We don't expect definite answer, but we want to inform the Council
13 where we are, and also to hear from the Council if we need to
14 address any concerns you may have at this time. And then by the
15 April meeting, we will have this action paper. Remember, the action
16 paper is nothing but a compilation of the information that we have.

17
18 And then you have to determine the next steps. Remember, for any
19 modification of the management plan, have to schedule public
20 hearings, etcetera, etcetera. Yeah.

21
22 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. And just to provide a little bit more
23 information about the process. So, then when the draft options
24 paper is brought to the Council for their discussion, and then the
25 Council decide, "okay," there are going to be options there that
26 you may not even want to pursue. And that's the kind of guidance
27 that you will give to the staff and there's options in there that
28 are like, "okay, I think staff can go ahead and evaluate these
29 options." And then the staff will start looking into evaluating in
30 terms of effects of each one of the proposed options that are in
31 there. Then next time they come to the Council meeting and then
32 basically they will become alternatives that will be evaluated.
33 And then, as you have seen in the past, we typically bring the
34 options and we said, "okay, so these are the pros of this
35 alternative, these are the cons; these are the summary of the
36 effects that would be expected for the economy, for the
37 environment, etcetera," and all of those things with the idea that
38 the Council can make an informed decision as to what would be their
39 preferred route.

40
41 And then after that, let's say that the Council is ready to make
42 a decision as to what will be the preferred alternative. And then,
43 it goes back to the drawing table and then the Council can later
44 vote to submit the amendment to NMFS for approval and then start
45 working on the regulations. That will be NOAA Fisheries working on
46 the regulations. And then, Heather has some additional comments
47 that she would like to make.

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Heather?
2

3 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you. Heather Blough here. It will be
4 important at this meeting to hear from folk to help us vet and
5 refine the draft options that Sarah is going to present. We will
6 be applying the criteria that we're presenting to you today between
7 now and the April meeting to the stocks and the plan to see how it
8 shakes out. If we use the criteria that we talk about today and
9 that you guys provide input on then which species would move to
10 the ecosystem component category, which might be removed from the
11 plan.
12

13 We can bring that back to the April meeting. And then we have the
14 opportunity to make some more qualitative decisions based on input
15 from the DAPs, the Council as to, you know, are there outcomes
16 that don't make sense that we might want to tweak or refine in
17 between that meeting and the next when we go to the public hearing
18 draft. So, the discussion today will be important just in helping
19 us to make sure that the criteria we're looking at do make sense
20 for, considering if we want to move something into a different
21 category or take it out of the plan altogether.
22

23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. And it's important to mention it now. When
24 we discussed it with Andy Strelcheck, Carlos and I, we were talking
25 about the possibility of a need for having an interim meeting, a
26 virtual meeting of one day between today, this meeting and April.
27 But it seems that with all the work that we need to do, probably
28 that meeting is not needed at this time. So, the next meeting will
29 be in April. You will receive the information that was outlined by
30 Graciela and María.
31

32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Any more discussion. A quick ten-minute
33 break.
34

35 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)
36

37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We're going to get going again.
38

39 Okay. Back to the agenda. So, next on the agenda is the Southeast
40 Fishery Science Center Updates with Kevin McCarthy. Kevin, the
41 floor is yours.
42

43 **SOUTHEAST FISHERY SCIENCE CENTER UPDATES - KEVIN MCCARTHY,**
44 **CARIBBEAN FISHERIES BRANCH, NOAA FISHERIES SEFSC**
45

46 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Good morning, everybody. Can you hear me?
47

48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.

1
2 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Alright. I'm going to share my screen. Are you
3 able to see presentation mode?
4
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.
6
7 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Terrific. Alright. Well, good morning, everybody.
8 I wish I could be there with you, but I'll have to attend virtually
9 on this meeting. I'm going to present with some help from, Kate
10 Overly, a contractor at our Panama City Lab, the update for the
11 Science Center.
12
13 We're going to cover three general topics. I'll give you updates
14 on SEDARs 84, 91 and 103. We'll talk some about collaborative
15 projects with our partners in the Caribbean and then finish up
16 with a social science project overview. So, we'll start with stock
17 assessments.
18
19 SEDAR 84, as you all know, is yellowtail snapper in Puerto Rico
20 and Saint Thomas/Saint John, and stoplight parrotfish in Saint
21 Croix. We were scheduled for review with the SSC in November,
22 obviously postponed due to the lapse in funding. This assessment
23 has gone through review with the Center for Independent Experts as
24 well as, SSC. Some of the SSC were in that workshop, that review
25 workshop. All of those reports have been released to the public.
26 You can access them at the SEDAR website shown here, sedarweb.org.
27
28 We have some additional model runs that were recommended for Puerto
29 Rico by the SSC in the September meeting. Those will be explored,
30 for SSC review, hopefully-- what we'd like to do is do that in the
31 spring of 2026. So, the Virgin Islands models are complete and
32 will be reviewed as they stand. The Puerto Rico models will have
33 updated inputs and will include data through 2024.
34
35 The SEDAR 84 terminal year had been 2022. That's getting a little
36 stale now. So, we'll update the data inputs through 2024, present
37 those to the SSC in the spring.
38
39 Similarly, SEDAR 91, all the assessment reports, are again at the
40 SEDAR website. The Virgin Islands assessments were reviewed by the
41 SSC in September. I'll be discussing that more later, in this
42 meeting. They were accepted as best available science and
43 recommended to be used to inform management decisions.
44
45 The SSC review of the Puerto Rico assessment also scheduled for
46 November, again postponed. We'll get back to that one in the
47 spring. There are some recommendations that were made by the SSC
48 for the Puerto Rico model, for some sensitivity model runs, and

1 we'll also update those data through 2024. The terminal year for
2 that assessment was 2023, so we'll add that additional year.

3
4 Moving on to SEDAR 103 just for everyone's recollection, this is
5 using alternate assessment methods and reviewing those. This is a
6 very technical workshop. It's different from our normal SEDARs.
7 We're not focused on a single species. We're not focused on moving
8 through that single species with a stock assessment. What we want
9 to do is review and recommend multiple options, alternative
10 approaches to provide scientific advice to the managers.

11
12 Those approaches may differ among species and species groups, but
13 the goal is to have an analytical approach for every federally
14 managed species in the U.S. Caribbean. Now, the answer may be there
15 aren't enough data to do much, but we want to have approaches for
16 every species that have sufficient data, and some of them may be
17 wrapped up in ecosystem level things. Others may use very data
18 limited approaches. That's the goal. So, I think it can
19 fundamentally change the way we are doing business in terms of our
20 stock assessments and providing scientific advice for management.

21
22 And you can see here that the organizing committee included Council
23 staff, SSC members, folks from the Science Center from CIMAS and
24 from SEDAR. CIMAS being the Cooperative Institute at the University
25 of Miami. So, we had to change up the schedule a bit. We finished
26 the terms of reference in the schedule. We had all the workshop
27 appointments, all the people who are going to participate, and we
28 had the shutdown. So, we missed two of these webinars. So, we've
29 moved our scoping webinar, which is when we'll discuss the terms
30 of reference with all the participants, discuss the scope of work,
31 talk about what a working paper needs to look like, have some
32 reference documents for them to review, that will happen sometime
33 during the week of January 12th.

34
35 Our data webinar is then, of course, pushed back. So, we'll have
36 a series of data webinars. The goal there is to discuss the data
37 before an in-person workshop so that we can focus on the analytical
38 methods at that workshop, and we'll have already covered the data.
39 So that's now pushed back to February.

40
41 We'll have several more data webinars. One, during the week of
42 March 23rd, the one in April, that week has yet to be determined.
43 The same with a final data webinar, which we'll also wrap up with
44 a pre-workshop discussion. That's in May. We'll have the working
45 papers from everyone due in either May or June, and that's
46 dependent upon when this last thing here, the in-person method
47 development workshop happens. That was scheduled to be the April,
48 but it's now pushed back to summer. We have, sent out a doodle

1 poll to participants with options in June, July, and August.
2
3 So, we'll see when everybody can attend. That's a tough time for
4 a lot of people. It's field season. Folks are unavailable because
5 they're out on the water doing surveys and such. So, we'll see
6 when that happens and adjust that working paper submission. Maybe
7 we've got time for another data webinar, if necessary, but we'll
8 see how that plays out.
9
10 After this workshop and I'm not going to show another slide of
11 this. After this workshop, we will have another series of webinars
12 because what we'll do with the workshop is determine the best
13 approaches to move forward with, and then folks will go back and
14 start those analyses or continue those analyses, and we'll have a
15 later, after another series of webinars to review that work, we'll
16 have another in-person review workshop. It probably won't involve
17 all the participants, but those dates are still very much up in
18 the air dependent upon this first in-person workshop.
19
20 So, now I'm going to turn the mic over to Kate. And, Kate, just
21 let me know when you would like me to advance the slide.
22
23 **KATHERINE E. OVERLY:** Thanks, Kevin. Can y'all hear me?
24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yep.
26
27 **KATHERINE E. OVERLY:** Uh-oh. Okay. Great. Good morning, everyone.
28 So, I'm going to be providing an update on the Puerto Rico Reef
29 Fish Survey. And just those that aren't familiar, if there's anyone
30 on the call, this has been an ongoing project since about 2017,
31 2018. Next slide, Kevin.
32
33 So, a little bit of project overview again, just in case there's
34 any folks that aren't familiar with it, but we developed a
35 collaborative fishery independent survey that we have since
36 implemented island wide in Puerto Rico. Historically, it's been
37 from 50 to 450 meters. We are now expanding that into shallow water
38 as well, which I'll go into in a little bit more detail, but that's
39 going to be from 20 meters now.
40
41 So, we have a 20-to-50-meter depth bin, too. But that is hook and
42 line fishing predominantly, although we are expanding that as well.
43 And then, the survey itself, has stratified random sampling. So,
44 we have, seven depth bins and three rugosity bins, that go into
45 that site selection. And, really, the main goal-- so it's a
46 collaborative survey. So, we have a full team in Puerto Rico,
47 fishers, scientists, and observers that help us get this work
48 completed. The main goal is to generate indices of abundance, and

1 size structure for those commercially important snapper and
2 grouper species.

3
4 So, a lot of those deep-water ones are on the right-hand side of
5 the slide there, but, obviously, we are expanding into shallow
6 water, so we do expect to add a few more species, hopefully, in
7 the coming years. But this survey not only does it generate, you
8 know, those indices of abundance and size structure for stock
9 assessment and management, but it generates a lot of other data as
10 well. So, you know, we can get diversity indices, spatial
11 distributions of these species, as well as biological samples.

12
13 We do a lot of life history sampling, for collaborative age growth,
14 reproduction, population connectivity, and adding tissues to
15 genetic databases. So, there's a lot of work that goes into this
16 project. Next slide.

17
18 So, the team, we have some recent results here, we were able to
19 implement that full island-wide sampling, which we've been doing
20 for a couple of years now, but that map on the right. So, they
21 were able to complete 200 stations, this spring. And you can see
22 that island wide. Those are red points, I believe. So, yeah, you
23 can kind of see that full spatial distribution. In addition to
24 that CPUE data and that length composition data that the survey
25 generates, we also, obviously, collect those biological samples.

26
27 So, we have a current project that's led by Dr. Virginia Shervette,
28 out of the University of South Carolina at Aiken. So, we are
29 supplying silk and queen snapper life history samples for age
30 growth in reproduction studies to her, as well as the Puerto Rico
31 DNER and some of our NOAA collaborators as well, with some other
32 species.

33
34 And then the last bullet on this slide here. So, we were able to
35 present at the National AFS, this would have been 2024, some of
36 the key results from this survey. So, we've worked really hard on
37 optimizing the survey design. So, all of the work that we've put
38 into that, we see a 55% for silk and a 70% for queen reduction in
39 effort and thus funds, with all of this optimization. So, I talked
40 about that stratified random sampling, so that kind of optimization
41 for that has gotten us this reduction.

42
43 And at that same time, we ran the coefficient of variation, the
44 CVs for both queen and silk. So, for queen, we got a 23% CV and
45 13% for silk. And, obviously, since then, this was 2024, we have
46 a few field years of sampling, so we'll be updating that really
47 soon, actually. Kevin, if you can go to the next slide, please.

48

1 I'll jump down to the third bullet, but we do have a manuscript in
2 prep on that survey universe design. So, those two last bullets on
3 the last slide, will be going into a manuscript, and we'll be
4 updating those CVs with the more recent years as well. But we were
5 able to begin our sampling again. So, the team is actually
6 currently sampling this month and has been sampling, since prior
7 to the shutdown. So, we have 270 stations that the team is getting
8 island wide. And I mentioned, you know, historically, that's been
9 in deep-water, so we had that 50 to, you know, 450-meter depth
10 bin, but we were able, with leveraged IRA funding, to expand into
11 that shallow water bin. So, the team is also now deploying hook
12 and line gear from 20 to 50 meters, and that is really just allowing
13 us to have overlap with the other shallow water surveys that occur
14 in the area.

15
16 With that, if we jump down to that bottom bullet there, we did--
17 we're really excited about this, and it goes kind of hand in hand
18 with that shallow water sampling that we're doing. But we received
19 300k in leveraged funds through the EASA funding source, and
20 that'll span over the next three to five years. And it's partially
21 funding the internal development of our final Stereo-Baited Remote
22 Underwater Video System.

23
24 So, if you're familiar with this project and all the work we've
25 done, we have done a lot of research and development on camera
26 systems. So, there was not an off the shelf product, you know,
27 that went down to 450 meters where we could see fish and not bias
28 the response to the lights. It had to be compact and lightweight
29 and easily deployable, all for a low cost. So that's a lot of big-
30 ticket items for a camera system.

31
32 And so, we are in the final development of that this spring. We'll
33 be building the final model and then deploying it this summer and
34 testing it. So, the goal is to have this standardized system so
35 we're not changing our cameras year after year after year. We have
36 a set camera system that we are not going to continue modifying.

37
38 So, this final setup will have back-to-back facing stereo video
39 cameras. We'll still be able to generate that length composition
40 data. And then we've done a lot of research with our counterparts
41 in the Pacific Islands on what wavelengths to use for the lights,
42 and we're settling in and about, like, an amber to red orange
43 wavelength so as not to bias the fish response with white light.

44
45 And kind of in hand with that development of the system is that
46 AI/ML pipeline. So, artificial intelligence and machine learning
47 pipeline, that we will be developing as well for the video reading.
48 So, it takes a lot of time to basically read these videos.

1 Something we're doing with our branch in the Gulf is developing a
2 program and algorithms that will assist us with this video reading
3 for identifying these species. So, we're leveraging some of the
4 algorithm and what we've been doing in the Gulf, into this work in
5 the Caribbean as well.

6
7 And then also, gear comparison studies between the cameras that
8 we're developing, the hook and line gear, and the diver sampling,
9 through NCRMP. So, looking at that overlap between those systems,
10 and then from there, a full-scale calibration survey across all of
11 those methods.

12
13 So, the team is quite busy. It's kind of a big update. We have a
14 lot of really, really exciting things taking place, that will
15 propel the survey forward, and we'll be able to, you know, increase
16 the optimization of the survey and introduce some new methods that
17 should be really helpful. I think that's it, Kevin, for me.

18 19 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

20
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any questions so far? Oh, Heather.

22
23 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, Heather Blough. So, thank
24 you, Kevin and Kate, for that great presentation. It's great to
25 see the cooperative research that's going on. I'm just wondering,
26 has the Council had any conversations about how we can integrate
27 the data that's coming out of that into management?

28
29 Like, is the plan to incorporate that data into the SEDAR 103
30 process? Is there any opportunity to use some of the results in
31 looking at the interest in revisiting some of the current
32 regulations that might be outdated or redundant? Or is it so early
33 in the process that we haven't yet thought that through?

34
35 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Graciela here. So, a couple of things.
36 One, we'll probably be looking at all that information in SEDAR
37 103. Second, we do have additional data points that maybe could be
38 included in this. This comes from the ATLAS and inventory of 2005
39 that the Council did through the Coral Reef Conservation Grant
40 Program. So, everything up to that date, it's included there,
41 including a CPUE for the deep-water snappers. So, all the research
42 that have been done to that point, it's included in there.

43
44 I don't know if they already have it in the database. It should be
45 in the Oracle database that the Science Center had put together.
46 And third, we do have Coral Reef Conservation Program Grant also
47 who provided data on the water column characteristics and also
48 some additional information on the deep-water habitats.

1
2 And lastly, there is, and I don't know if we've actually mined
3 that database, the Nautilus, Okeanos Explorer, and other missions
4 that NOAA has had in the area after 2005. And those probably also
5 provide information for the deep-water snapper group. I don't know
6 in the SEDAR 103, we're going to be so specific about, you know,
7 we're talking about deep-water ecosystems versus the shallower
8 areas that have much more data over the years, so that's something
9 that 103 would have to discuss and determine what they're going to
10 do. Or if they're thinking about doing the whole ecosystem as, you
11 know, shallow-to-deep with that changes in the species that are
12 encountered at each of those.

13
14 I did talk to Nelson earlier today and one of the things that we
15 are also doing is that the IRA funding, and you'll hear about it
16 this afternoon, it's looking at the variability in some of the
17 parameters for the species of interest to the Council, and that
18 includes some of the deep-water species. So, that should be coming
19 into the picture also for SEDAR 103. The IRA funding doesn't have
20 any no-cost extension, so most of the heavy work should have been
21 done by the time SEDAR 103 meets.

22
23 But the information that they have is that 2025 apparently for the
24 deep-water snapper fishery was a really bad year. So, now we're
25 not talking only about the profile of the water column but we're
26 also talking about the exchange of the water masses, you know, the
27 Sargasso 18-degree water that comes into the Mona Channel and all
28 that information.

29
30 So, I'm hoping that we will take all of this into consideration
31 when we come to the table and really begin looking at 103, SEDAR
32 103. Does that answer your question?

33
34 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Yes, thanks, Graciela.

35
36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Have a couple of hands up there. Think
37 Andy and Kevin. Andy? Kevin?

38
39 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Kevin, we cannot hear you.

40
41 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Oh, sorry. I couldn't hear you. So, I've still
42 got slides to go. The presentation isn't complete. Are you still
43 seeing my screen?

44
45 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Nope. So, we'll go back to your
46 presentation.

47
48 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Somehow, we got disconnected there. We're only

1 halfway through. I didn't know that you couldn't hear or see, so,
2 sorry for that.

3

4 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Sorry, Kevin?

5

6 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I'm going to--

7

8 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Can you reshare your screen?

9

10 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Yep. I'm going to do that now, and we'll keep
11 going. And I can get back to the SEDAR 103 questions as well. So,
12 sharing my screen again. And, putting it into presentation mode.

13

14 Alright. Can everybody hear me still?

15

16 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Yes.

17

18 **SOUTHEAST FISHERY SCIENCE CENTER UPDATES-Cont.**

19

20 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Okay. Perfect. So, this is where we left off. And
21 I was saying that I've been involved in some of these projects,
22 but not all of them. So, if I misspeak, and misrepresent, that's
23 entirely on me and not the fault of the folks doing actual work.

24

25 But I am involved in this Puerto Rico Recreational Port Sampling.
26 This is collaborative work between Puerto Rico DRNA and the Science
27 Center. The project is in the seventh round of eight weeks of
28 periods of sampling. So, we'll do an eight week round, an eight-
29 week period of sampling, analyze the data, modify the survey
30 design, and get the samplers back out for another eight week round.
31 So, we're in the middle of the seventh one of those.

32

33 So right now, we've got two port samplers. Each are sampling four
34 times a week. Again, this is recreational sampling. 175 trips have
35 been sampled, and they've seen 65 different species. And as I said,
36 with each round, we continue to work on the survey design and the
37 stratification of the sampling.

38

39 We've also got a Puerto Rico lobster survey. This is a trap survey.
40 We've talked about this one in the past. Working with Puerto Rico
41 fishers in a collaborative project along with a local contracting
42 company, scientific company.

43

44 We've got an initial year of sampling that'll begin this winter.
45 We're starting now with a paired trap design. This sampling is
46 really to get at what are the animals that are going to recruit
47 into the fishery in the next year or so as they grow large enough
48 to be harvested. So, this paired trap design has a trap that's

1 sort of a standard-- we've standardized all this with the help of
2 the fishermen, and we've got a design that one trap is meant to
3 fish as a normal trap would, and the other one will catch the
4 smaller lobsters and retain them.

5
6 So, anyway, that's ongoing. Kate mentioned the NCRMP survey, the
7 National Coral Reef Monitoring Program. This is the dive survey.
8 In 2025 they were able to sample in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin
9 Islands. This is the shallow water survey because it's a dive
10 survey, so they can get down to about 30 meters. 268 sites in Saint
11 Croix, 266 in Saint Thomas/Saint John, and 231 in Puerto Rico this
12 year. Those data will be quality controlled and made publicly
13 available for inclusion in any sort of future analyses, including,
14 reef fish stock assessments. That should be done by the spring of
15 2026.

16
17 They're also planning a meeting of all fisheries-independent spiny
18 lobster programs. So, these are dive programs like SEAMAP-C, NCRMP
19 of course, and the National Park Service does a dive survey for
20 lobster. And, basically, it's to better coordinate those surveys.
21 Make sure that the methods are standardized. They're not
22 duplicating effort. They're maximizing their resources.

23
24 Queen conch surveys have been ongoing for since 2023. Saint
25 Thomas/Saint John that survey occurred in 2023. 2024 with Saint
26 Croix. 2025 was meant to be Puerto Rico. They ran into a little
27 bit of trouble with postponements, with contracting delays, and
28 then, ran into the end of the year, and the contracts were not yet
29 in place. So, they're looking for carryover money. Hopefully, those
30 funds will become available again this year, and we'll be able to
31 complete those surveys during 2026.

32
33 They're also doing genetics work. They've got sequencing and
34 bioinformatic analyses of samples that they've collected in the
35 Florida Keys, Dry Tortugas, Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico. That
36 work is nearly complete. They've collected additional samples in
37 the British Virgin Islands, Saba, Bermuda, Tobago, and Grand
38 Cayman. And they're working to get samples from Turks and Caicos,
39 Barbados, and Belize in the coming year. That will give them a
40 pretty broad array of samples across the Greater Caribbean, which
41 will be really nice to have. And so, that work is continuing.

42
43 There is a lot of interest in aquaculture. We know. There'll be
44 more discussions about that, later in this meeting. But with the
45 University of Puerto Rico, there is renewed interest with the
46 hiring of a new professor, and that may provide a possibility of
47 collaboration with Science Center scientists. It could include
48 things like rearing red hind or yellowtail snapper juveniles for

1 heat stress experiments and also rearing spiny lobster juveniles
2 to determine molt frequency and growth rates, maybe some heat
3 stress experiments with those, too. This would be, perhaps, paired
4 up with our trap survey to help us design that recruit survey from
5 the traps combined with these with these growth rates, and we can
6 get a really nice index of recruitment to the fishery, I think.

7
8 Finally, we've got social science projects that are ongoing. In
9 Saint Croix, this is the oral history work that SSRG, the Social
10 Science Research Group at the Science Center has been doing. Those
11 interviews occurred in September in Saint Croix. They completed
12 nine interviews and collecting others via Zoom meetups.

13
14 They're collecting additional oral histories in Puerto Rico in
15 2025, so I guess that work will be here in December. You can access
16 the Saint Thomas oral histories on what's called the Voices
17 database. I've got a link here. NOAA.gov/NOAA-voices.

18
19 The collection that you find there is U.S. Caribbean oral history
20 project, so you can take a look at those. There is a paper in
21 preparation, looking at the use of oral histories as a means of
22 incorporating local ecological knowledge into fisheries
23 management, something everyone is interested in. They're also
24 examining perceived and experienced changes in the marine
25 environment, particularly with the sargassum inundations that have
26 been occurring.

27
28 Also, interviewing Saint Croix lobster fishers regarding the
29 history of lobster fishing in Saint Croix. I think that was coupled
30 with some of the oral history work. And they're working with
31 pelagic fishers also in Saint Croix to discuss the use of FADs and
32 the idea of conflict among users of that resource. And SSRG staff
33 are working on the IPT options for revising FMP selection criteria
34 for the Caribbean. So, they're working with Council staff and SERO
35 staff and getting at the issues of which spaces should be managed.
36 And that's, I think, it for our presentation.

37
38 Any questions?

39
40 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Gerson?

43
44 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Going to move to a different mode here so I can
45 see hands going up.

46
47 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** I don't want to point fingers at nobody, but,
48 actually, we haven't had a FAD in Saint Croix in over seven years,

1 I guess. Fifteen? I stand corrected.
2
3 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** We did deploy three FADs in 2019, including one
4 in Saint Croix, and it was gone within a year and a half.
5
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?
7
8 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I can go back to that question about incorporating
9 some of this information to SEDAR 103, and that is absolutely the
10 intent. These are really valuable datasets and sources of
11 information. So, we want to include all of this in SEDAR 103. A
12 lot of it will be discussed in the webinars leading up to the in-
13 person workshop. And as those data are used in particular analyses,
14 they'll be reviewed in that in-person workshop.
15
16 The workshop itself, the in-person part, is really meant to be a
17 review of the methods, but we will be discussing all the data and
18 the possible uses of those data throughout the SEDAR 103 process.
19
20 **SENNAI HABTES:** Hey, Kevin. Couple of questions for you. One, going
21 back to Kate's presentation. I noticed in terms of, like, the
22 analysis of the video reading, you guys had identified an AI and
23 a machine learning pipeline development for video reading. I was
24 wondering if you could describe where you are on that process. And
25 if so, you know, let us know how you're coordinating, because there
26 is a lot of other projects that do video reading in the Caribbean
27 that are trying to develop similar pipelines, and I think that
28 would be a good area for coordination.
29
30 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I agree completely, Sennai. I'm going to-- that
31 was part of Kate's presentation. So, Kate, if you're available,
32 you want to--
33
34 **KATHERINE E. OVERLY:** Yeah. Absolutely. Can you hear me?
35
36 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah.
37
38 **KATHERINE E. OVERLY:** Okay. Perfect. And that was Sennai. That was
39 you talking, right?
40
41 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah, Kate.
42
43 **KATHERINE E. OVERLY:** Hey. Okay. Yeah. So, I know you had reached
44 out to Matt Campbell who's my brand's chief as well. So, yes. We
45 are working with specifically the VIAME software that he probably
46 would have spoken to you about in those emails. I can't remember
47 exactly what he responded with now. But so, we're building those,
48 and they're currently pretty operational for about nineteen of our

1 commercially important species in the Gulf. And so, the plan is to
2 take those algorithms that we've already built up in the Gulf for
3 reef fish, because there's some overlap, not like a ton. Obviously,
4 we don't see very large numbers of queen or silk or a lot of those
5 deep-water snappers. But the goal is to continue adding to those
6 libraries.

7
8 So, improving the algorithm for species in the Caribbean, which we
9 can do a multitude of ways, whether that's including imagery from,
10 like, the deep-water and shallow water survey, now is the Puerto
11 Rico survey, or if that's using SEAMAP-C data, or something along
12 those lines. I think I talked with Omar about that a little bit
13 too during the training meeting. But yeah.

14
15 So, the goal would be to make those algorithms, to make those
16 models available to anyone that could utilize them in the
17 Caribbean. Like, that is the end goal. So, you could plug that
18 into your videos, theoretically, as long as this is the same
19 species, or we've improved the algorithms enough for the species
20 of interest on your end for someone else to then also use.

21
22 Something that we don't get a lot of, so the model is not optimized
23 for, but it would be fairly easy to do since they're distinct are,
24 like, spiny lobster and conch. So, we don't see a whole lot of
25 those in the Gulf, obviously. We don't have a whole lot of imagery
26 or won't have a whole lot of imagery from the type of survey that
27 we're doing. But that could easily be plugged in. You could develop
28 a model using that software as well for, like, those types of
29 species.

30
31 But, yeah, for collaboration, for sure. That's the name of the
32 game, and we definitely want to help as much as we can with this.
33 It's not supposed to just be for one survey. It's supposed to be
34 utilized across the suite of surveys, whoever can utilize it, of
35 course.

36
37 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. So, I would say, Kate, keep me cc'd on, like,
38 any coordination on that. I think we currently pretty much have
39 video both in the U.S.V.I. and Puerto Rico for pretty much every
40 managed species, including for conch and lobster. I think where
41 we're limited is developing the database management that would
42 allow for easy analysis and processing. And so, I think, while you
43 guys are developing that or if you have that in place, helping us
44 coordinate to develop that system as well as training for using
45 the VIAME software toolkit would be beneficial, which I'm in the
46 process of trying to write grant funding for that.

47
48 So, knowing specifically how you guys are doing it and what you're

1 doing would help me develop better use of that funding.
2

3 **KATHERINE E. OVERLY:** Yeah. Absolutely. Maybe we can have a chat,
4 out in the next couple of days or something outside of this meeting
5 and go into a bit more detail. I think, Scott Brown is on our team,
6 and he, I think, reached out to you as well. He does a lot of our
7 model building, so we could set up a call amongst us and chat
8 further about it, for sure.
9

10 **SENNAI HABTES:** I think that would be helpful.
11

12 **KATHERINE E. OVERLY:** Yeah. Absolutely.
13

14 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Hey, Kevin and Sennai. Was looking at
15 the recreational fishery activities that the Science Center has.
16 And I have to congratulate the U.S.V.I. because I do have my
17 recreational fishing license already. So, that apparently has been
18 moving forward. So, that's really a good information that should
19 come to the assessment group.
20

21 Are we also getting data from the recreational fishers through any
22 of these projects? And if not, what do we need to do, you know, to
23 help out with that?
24

25 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. Right now, we're still in the process of
26 developing the system for collecting the recreational data. We
27 want it to follow the same format that we use for the CCRs. But
28 the way that data has been managed as well as the system that's
29 been set up for it, like, none of that information is clear. So,
30 it's been like a very long process for gathering both the spatial
31 data set up, and we also wanted to follow the same process for
32 going into the databases that they're used on the federal level
33 similar to what Puerto Rico's gone through.
34

35 So, what we are trying to do is eliminate any of the headaches
36 from that as we're developing the system. My guess is that within
37 the next six to eight months, we'll likely have that set up. So,
38 by end of 2026, there'll likely be recreational fisheries catch
39 reports coming in from the for-hire data and then voluntary from
40 any other recreational fishers. But it's not an easy system to set
41 up.
42

43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?
44

45 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** One more question. And I don't--
46

47 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** I would also say, Graciela--
48

1 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Go ahead. Go ahead.
2

3 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** So, one follow-up to your question, Graciela. So,
4 I would also say, as I mentioned earlier in the presentation, we're
5 working with Grisel in Puerto Rico on the recreational survey
6 there. So, that's a port sampling survey as well as working with
7 Sennai and his team on port sampling in the Virgin Islands, and
8 that covers all sectors of the fishery, including, the recreational
9 fishery. And those are all ongoing efforts.
10

11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?
12

13 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, one additional question that comes
14 to mind is, the reason for asking about why the FADs did not stay
15 in place because that information-- we are now managing pelagics.
16 Are these FADs in the EEZ or within the state territorial waters?
17 Do they supply that information, the fishers to the database that
18 DPNR has? Or is it mostly recreational charter and it hasn't come
19 into the system yet?
20

21 So, you know, these are the things that the gap analysis from the
22 data needs to know. Because if there is this big jump and there is
23 a FAD and people are fishing at those sites, then it's very
24 punctual and very spatial specific versus the rest of the-- and
25 who's fishing for all of that? So that's the reason for the
26 question regarding if you put them out, why do they disappear? Is
27 it navigation problems with the cruise ships or something or other?
28

29 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Are you asking that as a question for us? So,
30 there is a lifetime to FADs, and the FADs that we've had in the
31 past have been constructed with lime. There are multiple reasons
32 why FADs would move or break. They were deployed. They were in our
33 waters for about half of the lifetime that we expected those FADs
34 to be in the water. On the CCRs, there is a question for commercial
35 fishers if they fished out a FAD or not. Of course, we wouldn't
36 have had any data from 2020 until now, since our official FADs are
37 no longer in the waters.
38

39 But that is-- and, of course, the CCRs are developed in
40 coordination with the Southeast Science Fisheries Center. So, any
41 data that we would need, you can always-- I think the last time
42 that we updated those CCRs was with the new HMS regulations. And
43 so, if there is any kind of update that you would want us to
44 collect on the commercial data reports, that's something that could
45 easily be done for, you know, the next fishing year. But there
46 should be no gap in that data.
47

48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Gerson?

1
2 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Gerson Martínez, for the record. I will ask this
3 Council to consider the application process. Takes about two years
4 to get one of those FADs approved according to what Dr. Sinai has
5 told us in the past. I think you guys should revise those
6 applications and give the Virgin Islands the ability to replace
7 any FAD that drifts away for whatever reason without reapplying
8 for that permit.

9
10 That is the big issue right now in the Virgin Islands. That two
11 years wait for FADs. We really need those to take away the effort
12 against the reef resource. I know a lot of fishermen when the FADs
13 are there, they shift according to the demand of the year, they
14 shift from the reef towards FADs and pelagic fish. So, I think if
15 that permitting system changes, I think we would have more FADs in
16 the Virgin Island faster than what we really are getting them.
17 Thank you.

18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sabater?

20
21 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, for the record. Do we have any
22 data concerning whether these FADs affect or have an effect a bad
23 effect or good effect on the migration of pelagic fish? Thank you.

24
25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Data here and there, but they do attract
26 pelagics. And actually, they are used by recreational and
27 commercial fishers all over the world, since the time of Jesus
28 Christ. One problem that we have--

29
30 By the way, Gerson, the Council does not get involved in permits.
31 We don't have that authority. Because when you have a fish
32 aggregating device, it's a hazard to navigation until you declare
33 it differently. So, the Coast Guard, and the Corp of Engineers
34 people have to look at it.

35
36 But going back to your question, they are positive in terms of
37 attracting fish. They also have been proven to be an economic asset
38 for fisheries in some areas in the United States and the rest of
39 the world. In the Caribbean, they have several countries who got
40 involved into FADs. Actually, they're very active on it.

41
42 The problem that we have is, as we all know, we are in the middle
43 of an area where hurricanes come once in a while. That has been
44 detrimental to some FADs. The other thing that we have done-- well,
45 not we. I used to work on that before. They are deployed deeper.
46 So, they still attract fish, a different type of fish and they
47 have been positive.

48

1 Negative is that, in some cases, they attract the fish that you
2 want to protect, as it has been proved in other countries, and
3 it's detrimental to that fishery in particular, especially when
4 they attract fish that are spawning during that time. So, it has
5 pros and cons, but mostly in all the meetings that I have been
6 working with this, it is positive to have the FADs.

7
8 And by the way, in Saint Croix, when we were involved in that--
9 the problem with Saint Croix is that it's in the top of a mountain.
10 So, any deployment of a FAD has a challenge logistically. One of
11 them that was deployed in Saint Croix ended up in La Parguera.

12
13 So, it's an asset to the fishery, but it has some complications.

14
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I'm assuming that there's no word on this
16 National Permit from Army Corps on the FADs. Still not an answer
17 to that, Sennai?

18
19 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, one, that permit is a territorial process that
20 we're going through DPNR. If you would like to make FADs, something
21 that is done through the CFMC, that can be something that the
22 Council decides on and moves forward with. We're in the process of
23 trying to develop a permit, but developing FADs is something that
24 is done through-- the only thing that we can use it for is our
25 Sport Fish Restoration Funding through U.S. Fish and Wildlife
26 Service, which is primarily for recreational fishing. In fact,
27 only for recreational fishing. Right?

28
29 And so, that funding is limited in how we use it and disperse it.
30 So, we're using it to figure out processes where we can implement
31 a FAD program, but that takes time given that funding is getting
32 shorter and shorter for things. Now what I would recommend is if
33 you want to make that a priority here for the Council, then that's
34 something we can discuss, vote on, and move forward for creating
35 projects that we do for FADs from federal waters, which is
36 primarily where the FADs would exist within U.S.V.I. waters. And
37 so, if you want to do that, we can do that. Otherwise, I don't
38 think it's pertinent and useful using our times to talk about
39 territorial things that we're working on within our waters at a
40 time when we're discussing federal management and processes here.

41
42 That's what I would say.

43
44 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** But--

45
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Just give me a second here, Julian. But even if
47 the U.S.V.I. does get a permit for a FAD, it's going to be deployed
48 in federal waters, right, not in territorial waters?

1
2 **SENNAI HABTES:** Correct. And that is why we have to go through the
3 process with the Army Corps and CZM and all of the other permitting
4 processes. You can do that through a nationwide permit where we
5 create a list of all the potential sites that we're doing it, but
6 we also have to create a maintenance plan. We have to develop
7 budgets for doing that and putting them out there. There are new
8 requirements.
9
10 I've been waiting until I thought things were changing, which are
11 likely during this current administration that would make it more
12 acceptable for the type of FAD development that we were doing. So,
13 that is where we are currently with that process.
14
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Because I know there are fishermen out
16 there that are putting out their own FADs, but what it's creating
17 is a war out there. These guys are threatening to shoot each other.
18 I mean, it's getting really bad out there.
19
20 **SENNAI HABTES:** And so, in my understanding, that's within federal
21 waters, correct?
22
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.
24
25 **SENNAI HABTES:** And so, if the issue is a lack of enforcement
26 associated with what is now a problem associated with illegal FAD
27 deployment, as well as associated problems between registered
28 fishers that are utilizing a federal resource, then that is what
29 we should identify here and come up with a solution as part of
30 management that we do for federal fisheries. Right? But identifying
31 how territorial resources are being spent to put something like a
32 FAD in the water is not necessarily addressing that particular
33 point.
34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah.
36
37 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record. So, I totally agree
38 with what Sennai is saying. I think that's a great idea. I know
39 Miguel said earlier in his report that we are very strapped for
40 funding, but who knows here in the near future that some funding
41 could come available, and we've been hearing the fishers cry out
42 for FADs for a long period of time. And if by some way, some means,
43 the Council can assist in getting some FADs placed, since they're
44 being placed in federal waters, I think that's a great idea to
45 help expedite the process and add FADs to try to eliminate the
46 tension that's out there, especially in Saint Croix.
47
48 And, you know, talking with Mr. Ledee, Winston, is there. I like

1 to recognize him. He's a DAP member, and he's also a FAC member in
2 the Saint Thomas/Saint John District, former Council member. He
3 just came from Saint Barts, and, you know, they have hundreds of
4 FADs. They put them out on a regular basis, and they're catching
5 tons of dolphin and wahoo and everything, on a daily basis, because
6 they have so many FADs out there, and it has eased the pressure on
7 the shelf itself.

8
9 So, I'm just throwing that out there because I think Sennai's
10 statement is a very good statement. And I think it should be added
11 to the priority list at some point. And I'm going to leave it at
12 that for now.

13
14 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. There's no question that FADs are a good
15 idea. And by the way, you can not compare the United States with
16 other countries. Some other countries, they don't care about some
17 of the things that we have here. "You want a FAD? Yeah, go ahead
18 and put it." They have the money. They even have money from the
19 Japanese government, European Community, and Canadian Community.
20 And some of these countries have a very strong program for FADs.

21
22 In the Council we tried it before. At one time they told me, "Don't
23 spend any more money on FADs." We spent \$11,000 on FADs that I,
24 with Jose Rivera and Carlos Ramos, put it all together. They lasted
25 for a few weeks. The fisherman stole them. The other time we had
26 some beautiful FADs, and we deployed them with some money that we
27 received through the Council Grant Office, and those disappeared.
28 So, I was told, unless you get money from outside the Council based
29 money, do not spend one more dollar on FADs.

30
31 We can go back and ask for that idea. Actually, you said something
32 that, to me, is important. If we say that the Council is interested
33 in FADs, and then we talk to some people in NOAA and other places
34 and they get monies that can be funded to the Council, that will
35 be an excellent idea. We can help with that. Also, we have been
36 able to learn from past mistakes and we can apply that knowledge
37 to the new FADs.

38
39 And back to what's Sennai said, we can discuss FADs whenever we
40 want to discuss it. It's not a waste of time because FADs collect
41 information and that's why we do it. In the case of providing
42 opportunities for fishers, commercial and recreational, with FADs,
43 that's something that is within the realm of the Council, and we
44 can push for it. Actually, we can put it in the agenda for the
45 next two or three years, and then we can discuss it.

46
47 Genio is not here because he was called for another meeting. But
48 those are the kinds of things that he told me he might be interested

1 on hearing. New idea, better ideas, that we can put together on
2 the table. In the past, we had this negative reaction from some
3 people, but this is the future. Who knows? Maybe there is someone
4 out there that can help us with a program like that. So, what the
5 Council needs to do or say is, "Yeah, we support FADs for
6 commercial and recreational fishers. We will support any proposal
7 for any entity for FADs."
8

9 The other thing that we have to be mindful of is that we cannot
10 interfere with the regulations. The local government and the
11 federal government, or whoever wants to put a FAD out there, if
12 they don't comply with the regulation they are in violation,
13 illegal FADs. In some cases, that is creating some problems. For
14 example, I was in Vieques, I was in a meeting a long time ago, and
15 the fisher had blocks with a rope, and on top of it he had a
16 Styrofoam block. They attracted the fish. The fisherman use to
17 deploy that, you know, every other week. They use the way they
18 these were trapped. There was an initiative by a group of fishermen
19 in Saint Croix-- erm... Vieques, excuse me. --and it was
20 successful. So, that's where we are, Mr. Chairman, so far.
21

22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I have Blanchard and Nicole.
23

24 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Well, let me piggyback on a couple things
25 that were said here about the FADs. I do agree that they work just
26 like Mr. Magras says. I got cousins that fish in St. Bart's, and
27 they use FADs, and they put them out on their own, out of pocket.
28

29 Now, just like Miguel said, we have a different process in which
30 we use here. But the point I'm going to make here is that with or
31 without funding from the government, the fishers will put out the
32 FADs illegal or legal, because they make money off of it.
33

34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mhmm.
35

36 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** So, I would disagree with Sennai saying
37 that the FADs would have to be in federal waters because you could
38 employ them in local waters, especially around Saint Thomas that
39 you have the depth of water where you will catch the palagics along
40 with everything else. That could be done in local waters. Now in
41 federal waters, I would agree that they would be deployed for
42 basically palagics.
43

44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah.
45

46 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** So, the route of where I think the
47 Council fits in is if we want to create something that we are going
48 to pull pressure off the reefs. We need to create some place for

1 the pressure to go.

2

3 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah.

4

5 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** The pressure needs to move to the outside
6 and just like Nickey said. Fishing practices, our business is
7 making money. So, if at this time of the year, the FADs produce
8 and this fishery that we are in currently, it slows up, we're going
9 where the money is. That's just how it is. Each man is a business.
10 We get to make money. Unless you're a recreational guy and you do
11 this for fun.

12

13 So, to the end of the day, I think the Council should support the
14 FADs. I think we need to find some way of coming up with money and
15 maybe an easier solution than going through the loops that we have
16 to jump through, maybe we don't have to jump through 10 loops, we
17 just have to jump through five, to make this process easier to get
18 the pressure off of the reef.

19

20 So, I think this is a win-win for everybody. That's just my
21 personal opinion.

22

23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Carlos?

24

25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah.

26

27 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** To that point, one thing that we were discussing
28 before the meeting is that the outreach and education project, one
29 thing that we need to find out and distribute information to
30 everybody is what is a FAD? How can you deploy FADs? What are the
31 requirements in the U.S. Caribbean for FADs? And how can we assist
32 fishers especially, and even the local governments, if they want
33 to have a program with FADs.

34

35 That's the kind of thing that we can put together, and I think we
36 can communicate to NOAA Fisheries about the willingness. But if
37 you agree with that, Mr. Chairman, we need to have some, maybe a
38 motion or just an indication to the staff to pursue this further.
39 And then come back to the meeting in April with more information.

40

41 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Just to that point, the strategic plan
42 of the Council states, and thank you, Sarah, for that, that for
43 Saint Croix, it's a priority to, and I'll read, "collaborate with
44 the domestic and international partners to promote adaptive and
45 effective management that considers diverse community--" No,
46 that's not the one. 4.18, "Support the development of interagency
47 coordination for permitting of fish aggregating devices
48 deployment." So, we do have it in strategic plan.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.
3
4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Wait, wait. That's the kind of thing that looks
5 good on paper. But we haven't done a thing for that. A thing with
6 "s." My whole point is that if you agree, we can pursue that a
7 little bit further. And now that we have the concurrence of the
8 fishers, and I'm sure that in Puerto Rico, the fishers in Puerto
9 Rico will also have that idea, we can put it in the next DAP
10 meeting. So, have this information and distribute that
11 information, and I'm sure that we can move forward with this.
12
13 So, Graciela and I will have to, after this meeting, sit down,
14 look at the strategic plan and look at the avenues that we have to
15 move forward with a project like this for the support of FADs in
16 the U.S. Caribbean.
17
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Tony and then Nicole and Gerson and then Sennai.
19
20 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** And to also show why we support this is
21 the mere fact that when a guy goes and he invest this money on a
22 FAD and he puts it out there, he does not control what happens
23 around that FAD. So, if I dump in money into FAD and I got another
24 fisher coming here, beating me to my FAD, catching the fish that
25 I am supposed to be catching, this is a problem.
26
27 So, this, by the Council getting involved and finding funding and
28 making this a government FAD per se, that will neutralize anybody
29 saying, "This is mine," because it's not yours. You didn't put it
30 out. That not only happens in Saint Thomas and Saint Croix. Even
31 in Saint Barts, they have the same problem. You got guys putting
32 out FADs and somebody beats them to the FADs they manned in and
33 now they are confronted with this problem.
34
35 So, this is not a select problem to just here. And like I said,
36 after you dump money and effort into building this and putting it
37 out there, you plan to make money out of this, and when another
38 guy come in and sweeps in before you and catches what's on your
39 FAD, it becomes a problem.
40
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nicole?
42
43 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. I wanted to make a similar point to the
44 one that Graciela made. There are multiple references to FADs in
45 the strategic plan, including strategy 12.3, investigate the
46 potential of FADs to mitigate habitat loss and deploy where
47 appropriate. And then my second point was, I think it would be
48 illuminative to have the Office of Protected Resources perhaps

1 come and discuss the requirements that they would have for
2 federally funded FADs, and then differences in what privately
3 funded FADs would require for permitting.

4

5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Gerson?

6

7 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Gerson Martínez, for the record. I want to
8 piggyback on what on Mr. Blanchard and Mr. Magras and everybody
9 else said here, and I'm glad of what Dr. Nicole just said. I would
10 like to hear a motion here today concerning everything we have
11 discussed here just to start the movement of this very important
12 matter of fishing or taking away from the resource of the reef
13 structure. I think each and everybody here today should recognize
14 the efforts that getting FADs in the Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico,
15 and any U.S. regulated island or state, how much fishing a FAD
16 takes away from the reef resource. I think it's very important for
17 us that want to protect reef fish and the reef resource, especially
18 the queen conch.

19

20 I'm a diver by nature. In the past, when we had those FADs, I used
21 to stop diving sometime for one or two years cause we had the
22 clientele for the pelagic fish. The only thing right now is since
23 we don't have the FADs and we have the Chinese up in the Lesser
24 Antilles, they are stopping our resource from coming down here.
25 And if we don't have FADs to stop that resource, we are putting a
26 lot of pressure.

27

28 So, I would like a motion, if it's possible, to start this process,
29 this ball movement in taking off the pressure on the resource by
30 having more FADs deployment and the legal procedure to be a little
31 faster. Because we have been talking to Dr. Sennai and Dr. Nicole
32 about this procedure and that's the point that I always bring up,
33 the legal procedure takes two to three years to get stuff approved
34 even though that FAD was put there and it drifted away in eighteen
35 months, they have to start the procedure again. So, I think
36 modifications need to be made to make this effort and this
37 deployment of FADs easier.

38

39 Thank you.

40

41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai.

42

43 **SENNAI HABTES:** What I was going to say is, one, it's not the time
44 period of the procedure. It's just what is required to be
45 submitted. So, an application for putting something in the ocean
46 is extremely involved and requires a lot, particularly if it's
47 something permanent, a lot of information surrounding it. So, it
48 takes someone a long time to put that together. What I would

1 recommend is if this is truly something the Council wants to do
2 and provide resources to coordinating for the U.S.V.I., is for
3 Council staff to identify a person on the staff that would assist
4 DPNR in developing and submitting a permit for a nationwide for a
5 series of location for FADs throughout the U.S.V.I., as well as
6 identify a plan that is going to either get resources or help apply
7 for resources to put certain FADs out in conjunction with Virgin
8 Island's Department of Planning and Natural Resources.

9
10 Because right now, the only person in the U.S.V.I. that is doing
11 any work towards that is the Division of Fish and Wildlife, which
12 has myself along with four other fishery staff that does everything
13 in the U.S. Virgin Islands associated with fisheries, research,
14 outreach and education, infrastructure development, monitoring, as
15 well as, you know, outside research, as well as work for this
16 Council associated with both ecosystems-based fisheries management
17 and other associated tasks.

18
19 So, I think what we should really do is look at the resources that
20 are available and prioritize the things that we want to get done
21 because it is not possible. So, if this is something we want to
22 prioritize, we say it and we put resources towards doing it. That's
23 all I'm saying.

24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Heather?

26
27 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** I think following along with what Sennai is
28 saying, I do agree that some additional research would be helpful
29 to look into this. Both, in terms of the nationwide permitting
30 process, what that would look like. If we're looking at putting
31 them in federal waters, us doing some additional research see
32 what's been done in other regions. Nicole had mentioned the
33 importance of considering the protected resources requirements and
34 consultation requirements for federally funded versus privately
35 deployed FADs. So, maybe the action, if we want to make a motion,
36 the action could be to do some of that research between now and
37 the next meeting, if this is a priority.

38
39 I think we should also integrate this discussion into the
40 priorities discussion tomorrow and see where it falls on the list.
41 But I think that's probably the most responsible use of time at
42 this point on that.

43
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nicole?

45
46 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nicole Angeli, I
47 would like to propose a motion that the Council implement
48 strategies 4.18 on permitting and 12.3 on research for not just

1 Saint Croix, but for the entirety of the Caribbean, U.S. Caribbean,
2 and explore options and do research and have a presentation
3 provided to us at a 2026 Council meeting of their choice so that
4 we could engage further on this discussion with all of the
5 information available.

6
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Give me a second. Oh, I need to get that
8 up on the screen.

9
10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. I propose that the staff meet with Angeli
11 so we can write that. And probably after lunch, we can put it--

12
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** All right. Okay. So we'll prepare a motion for
14 after lunch.

15
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Wait. Wait. Do you have it, Nicole?

17
18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, we'll prepare this and then after lunch
19 we'll do the motion, when we have more time because we still got
20 Vance to go for the SSC. But I'd like to say that I'm pleased to
21 see that we're making some headway on FADs. Saint Croix has been
22 screaming about this for many years.

23
24 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, I propose that-- we're close to
25 five minutes --we break for lunch, have the motion, and then
26 continue with Vance's presentation. Yeah, because we don't want to
27 shorten his presentation. ¿Como cuanto tu necesitas, como quince
28 o veinte?

29
30 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Veinte, por lo menos.

31
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Veinte. So, after lunch. We can come back at
33 01:30.

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, we'll break for lunch and come back
36 at 01:30.

37
38 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on December 03, 2026.)

39
40 - - -

41
42 DECEMBER 03, 2026

43
44 WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

45
46 - - -

47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Okay. We're going to get going again. I
48 know lunch took quite a while. Seems to be our life story.

1
2 So, we have a motion to pull up on the board before we move on to
3 Vance's presentation on FADs. So, Angeli, is at an important
4 meeting with the commissioner, so she'll be back as soon as she's
5 done. But her presented motion is "*Motion for the CFMC to implement
6 their Saint Croix Strategic Plan Actions 4.18 and 12.3 for the
7 entire U.S. Caribbean, namely to explore options for permitting
8 and the relevant research on Fish Tracking Devices and to have a
9 presentation provided by the Council in 2026 that incorporates
10 feedback from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the NOAA Southeast
11 Fisheries Science Center, NOAA SERO and NOAA Office of Protected
12 Resources on those options.*"

13
14 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Hay que arreglar las siglas.

15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yeah. SEFSC. "F" and then "S". Yeah.

17
18 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We need a second.

19
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, we need a second on our--

21
22 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Second. Tony Blanchard.

23
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any discussion?

25
26 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Miguel, can I just make a quick comment?

27
28 I know this is, you know, between your council members, but just
29 a quick suggestion. I would add in the second last sentence that
30 incorporates feedback from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineer, U.S.
31 Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of Interior, and the Office
32 of Protected Resources, specifically from NOAA. I don't know. Just
33 a suggestion.

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So Sennai since there was an amendment to this
36 motion, and I think you're representing Nicole for now, would you
37 accept that correction?

38
39 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. We can. I move to accept the amendments to
40 the motion presented.

41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Tony, you agree with the--

43
44 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Yes.

45
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any further discussion? Yes. Heather?

47
48 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thanks, Heather Blough, here. I think we could

1 generalize the folks to include NOAA Fisheries. I think there's
2 other offices that we might want to consult with, and we could
3 figure out who's best, maybe, to represent. We'll definitely work
4 with PRD on it, but we might also want to bring in HMS and other
5 offices. So, you could replace all those NOAA offices with just
6 the NOAA Fisheries, and we'll make sure we have the right people
7 at the table.

8
9 Also, I wonder if it might be better to simplify it. Do we really
10 need to include the strategic plan pieces versus say something
11 more generally and leave it a little bit more open that we could
12 explore options for permitting and the relevant research on FADs?
13

14 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** But the thing is that those sections already do
15 that. That's why they are included in the motion. When you go to
16 a strategic plan, it is spelled out. It's all included in the
17 paragraph there. It's up to you to decide, but--

18
19 The other thing about NOAA Fisheries is that we want to make sure
20 that the proper offices of NOAA Fisheries are consulted. I guess
21 you just said that.

22
23 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** We can do that. Yeah. Because I think there might
24 be more offices that are listed there that we might want to loop
25 in.

26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Mhmm. Anne, do you want to say--

28
29 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** Anne Kersting, for the record. I was just going
30 to chime in about simplifying it. I agree with Heather. I don't
31 think you need to reference the strategic plan actions because you
32 do cover it right after where you reference them, and it talks
33 about exploring options for permitting and the relevant research
34 on FADs just to keep it simple. It's just my suggestion.

35
36 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Thank you.

37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, you're saying just delete the numbers, 4.18
39 and 12.3?

40
41 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** Yes. I don't think you need to reference the
42 plan and the numbers.

43
44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, how would you write it?

45
46 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** Yeah. I think you could do "motion for the CFMC
47 to explore options for permitting and the relevant research on
48 FADs" and then the rest. Which you could just--

1
2 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** For permit, let her finish. No. She has to
3 present that, and then the two have to accept it or not.
4
5 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** So, you can just delete if-- I mean--
6
7 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And it would say NOAA Fisheries instead of the
8 yellow thing.
9
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Should that say NOAA Fisheries or NOAA is just
11 fine.
12
13 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Just NOAA, just in case.
14
15 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** NOAA is just fine
16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, Anne, is that good?
18
19 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** Yes. Thank you.
20
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, Sennai?
22
23 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. I approve the amendments to the motion.
24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Blanchard?
26
27 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Yes.
28
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, the motion reads, "Motion for the
30 CFMC to explore options for permitting and development research on
31 FADs and to have a presentation provided by the Council in 2026
32 that incorporates feedback from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers,
33 Department of Interior, Department of Fish and Wildlife Service,
34 and NOAA on those options."
35
36 Any further discussion? So, we'll take it to a vote. I'm going to
37 start on my right with Sennai.
38
39 **SENNAI HABTES:** Aye.
40
41 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Aye.
42
43 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** You have to say your name first and then "aye."
44 It's starting with Sennai.
45
46 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabate, Aye.
47
48 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sennai Habtes, aye.

1
2 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Tony Blanchard, aye.
3
4 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Daniel Matos-Caraballo, aye.
5
6 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** You have to also ask Vanessa.
7
8 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, aye.
9
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, aye.
11
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Falta Heather.
13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** ¿Quién?
15
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Heather.
17
18 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Heather Blough, aye.
19
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I'm sorry. I'm sorry. [laughter]
21
22 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. You want to be the Chairman next year?
23 [laughter]
24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, *motion*
26 *carries*.
27
28 So, now we're going to move on to Vance Vicente on the SSC committee
29 report.
30
31 **SCIENTIFIC AND STATISTICAL COMMITTEE REPORT – VANCE VICENTE,**
32 **CHAIR**
33
34 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Before
35 I begin, I really have to give special thanks to Sarah Stephenson
36 and Liajay Rivera. They really built up this presentation for me,
37 in short.
38
39 So, this is the SSC report to the 188th Caribbean Fishery Management
40 Council meeting being held now December 3rd and 4th of 2025. Give
41 me a second here. Next slide.
42
43 So, we will go over. We'll go over some general information on the
44 biology and on the ecology on the Caribbean spiny lobster. We'll
45 go over the SEDAR 91 summary, the SEDAR SSC tasks, and the SSC
46 September meeting summary and action items. Next slide please.
47
48 Regarding the biology, we really have significant amount of

1 information on the biology of these species. I mean, starting from
2 their mating, their reproduction, how often they spawn, which is
3 all year long. We have a lot of information on the length
4 composition, etcetera, etcetera. But we need, I feel that there is
5 a gap regarding age. The Stock Synthesis 3, the SS3 model, which
6 has been used for stock assessment since 19-- I think since the
7 '57, I believe, SEDAR meeting on the lobster stock assessment is
8 an age- and size-structure model. So, far, we have a significant
9 amount of length composition, and we're beginning to look into
10 what is called the gastric mill ossicles, which are like otoliths
11 in fish, in which you can count annual growth rings. But that's
12 still at a very early stage, but there is a significant progress
13 happening. So, that will be my recommendation to fill in into the
14 biological knowledge of this important species.

15
16 Regarding the ecology, there is a very distinct life cycle with
17 different habitats for each stage. For example, phyllosoma larvae
18 is the planktonic stage of the spiny lobster, and the habitat is
19 open ocean. And I'd like to add something for you to know, I had
20 hired Reni García for over ten years to do the zooplankton studies
21 for one of the power plants in Puerto Rico, Ecoeléctrica, which I
22 was the environmental monitor. Throughout these years, there
23 wasn't a single phyllosoma larvae in any of the samples. So, I
24 believe that the open ocean habitat per se is a good definition of
25 the pelagic face of this species.

26
27 Then the juveniles, they settle on SAV Submerged Aquatic
28 Vegetation, which are the different types of seagrass beds, turtle
29 grass beds, widgeon grass, shoal grass, manatee grass, as well as
30 macrophytic benthic habitats. The adults are benthic, and they are
31 found-- their habitat is a benthic habitat, which includes various
32 types of submerged coral reefs, submerged hard grounds, submerged
33 rocky bottoms, as well as unconsolidated substrate habitats such
34 as sand, mud, etcetera.

35
36 We also know some about the feeding habits. We know that they feed
37 on gastropods, they feed on snails, they feed on sea urchins, which
38 makes them an important component of the ecosystem as such in
39 controlling populations of species that some are feeders or grazers
40 on live coral surfaces. We also know that they migrate from shallow
41 water habitats into deeper water habitats, what are called conga
42 lines. I think in the Virgin Islands they call it lobster runs.

43
44 But anyhow, they get one on top of each other, and then they
45 migrate towards deep-water. And that migration is triggered by
46 changes in temperature or changes in other oceanographic
47 conditions such as wave action, storms, hurricanes, and the like.
48 Oh, I also added here that, you know, the Caribbean seminar series

1 being coordinated by Kevin McCarthy are very useful, and maybe we
2 should have more seminars on this series regarding the ecology of
3 this species as well as other managed species. Next slide.

4
5 SEDAR 91. SEDAR 91 addressed the stock assessment for the U.S.
6 Caribbean spiny lobster, Saint Croix, Saint Thomas, and Saint John.
7 And the process consisted of an in-person data workshop with
8 several webinars before and after the workshop and a series of
9 assessment webinars. The review workshop was canceled because the
10 CIE, the Center for Independent Experts, were not able to
11 participate in the review of the assessment. The assessment was
12 conducted by the Southeast Fishery Science Center. Next slide,
13 please.

14
15 The SEDAR SSC tasks-- I have to go over this --are the following.

16
17 The Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee reviews the
18 Stock Assessment Report. Second, the SSCs are tasked with
19 recommending whether the stock assessment represents the best
20 available science. The SSC also determines whether the results
21 presented in the stock assessment reports are useful for providing
22 management advice and developing fishing level recommendations for
23 the Council.

24
25 An SSC may request that additional analyses be conducted or may
26 use the information provided in the stock assessment report as the
27 basis for their Fishing Level Recommendations, that is the
28 overfishing limit, OFL, and the acceptable biological catch. The
29 Caribbean Council's SSC also reviews the assessment, reviewed,
30 past, at its September 23rd through 25th of 2025 SSC meeting. Then
31 the Council received the SSC information, which is what I'm doing
32 right now, what we're doing right now at this December 2025
33 meeting.

34
35 Important to note that the documentation on SSC recommendation is
36 not part of the SEDAR process and is handled through each Council.
37 Next slide, please.

38
39 The SSC meeting of September 23-25 of 2025. Next slide, please.

40
41 Okay, on the left column, there is the list of the participants,
42 which are the SSC members. A total of 11 SSC members participated.
43 Therefore, there was a quorum to conduct this meeting. Also, the
44 DAP Chairs were very active. Oh, by the way, this was the first
45 virtual meeting. We didn't see each other face-to-face. So, it was
46 a little bit complicated, but it worked. So, Miguel, it worked.

47
48 So, the DAP Chairs, Julian Magras of Saint Thomas, Nelson Crespo

1 and Gerson from Saint Croix. They all had very active
2 participations on this. As well as the SERO staff, Southeast
3 Fisheries Science Center staff, some of the General Counsel staff,
4 researchers, and the CFMC members and staff.

5
6 The agenda overview was, one, review the SEDAR 91 U.S. Caribbean
7 spiny lobster of Saint Thomas/Saint John Assessment Report. Two,
8 review the SEDAR 91 U.S. Caribbean Spiny Lobster Saint Croix
9 Assessment Report. Three, review SEDAR 84 Caribbean Yellowtail
10 Snapper of Puerto Rico, Saint Thomas/Saint John, and stoplight
11 parrotfish for Saint Croix. Four, we received an update from Kevin
12 on SEDAR 103 U.S. Caribbean Application of Alternative Assessment
13 Methods, and then, we made also some recommendations. So, we can
14 go to the next slide.

15
16 The sources of the data are the three L's, landing, length, and
17 life history parameters. The life history parameters were carried
18 over from SEDAR 57. SEDAR 57 was a stock assessment report of the
19 U.S. Caribbean spiny lobster produced in August 2019 and made
20 available to the public the following month. Next slide.

21
22 Well, we don't have time to cover the three L's, but we'll start
23 with the right now the most important ones, which are the data
24 review of the landings. On the top graph, we see the landing since
25 the early 1970s to 2023 for Saint Thomas/Saint John. And we can
26 see here clearly that most of the catch, practically all of the
27 catch, was conducted by pots and traps. There was very little
28 reports on the-- well, there were reports, but the landings were
29 much significantly lower by lobsters being obtained or fished by
30 diving.

31
32 In the bottom graph, we see, again, the same. The landings in
33 metric tons from the '70s up to 2023. And this is the inverse. In
34 Saint Croix, most of the data, most of the fisheries for lobster
35 were conducted by diving and very few, very little by pots and
36 traps. So, these are the landing graphs.

37
38 The landings by table are the following. In 2021, you can see the
39 values on the middle column, 101,108 pounds. For Saint Croix,
40 39,782. I'm not going to read them all, but these are just the
41 data just laid out in a table format from 2021 to 2025. It is
42 important to note that the landing values for Saint Thomas/Saint
43 John and Saint Croix for 2024 and 2025 are provisional landings,
44 which were set equal to the three-year average from 2021 through
45 2023. And all the values are in pounds whole weight. Next slide,
46 please.

47
48 Regarding the action items. This is topic one. It deals with the

1 motions that were proposed during the SEDAR 91 U.S. Caribbean spiny
2 lobster for Saint Thomas/Saint John Assessment Report. There were
3 three motions that were proposed and approved. Motion one, the SSC
4 moves to recommend the assessment for SEDAR 91 U.S. Caribbean spiny
5 lobster for Saint Thomas and Saint John as the best scientific
6 information available. Motion two, the results presented in SEDAR
7 91 U.S. Caribbean spiny lobster for Saint Thomas and Saint John
8 are useful for providing management advice and developing fishing
9 level recommendations for the Council. Motion three was approved,
10 and it states that the SSC recommends including years using the
11 average of 2021 through 2023 as the provisional landings' values
12 for the 2024-2025 forecast for the SEDAR 91 U.S. Caribbean spiny
13 lobster for Saint Thomas and Saint John. The SSC discussed option
14 but did not recommend a sigma value. Can we have the next slide?
15

16 Okay. Motion proposed. Review SEDAR 91, U.S. Caribbean spiny
17 lobster, now for Saint Croix. Okay. Assessment Report. There were
18 four motions proposed and approved, which carried forward. Motion
19 four, the SSC moves to recommend the assessment for SEDAR 91 U.S.
20 Caribbean spiny lobster for Saint Croix as the best scientific
21 information available. Motion five, the results presented in SEDAR
22 91, U.S. Caribbean spiny lobster for Saint Croix are useful for
23 providing management advice and developing fishing level
24 recommendations for the Council. Motion six, the SSC recommends
25 including years using the average of 2021 through 2023 as a
26 provisional landings' values for the 2024-2025 forecast for the
27 SEDAR 91 U.S. Caribbean spiny lobster for Saint Croix. Motion
28 seven, the SSC recommends a sigma value of 0.5 for the SEDAR 91
29 U.S. Caribbean spiny lobster for Saint Thomas, Saint John, and
30 Saint Croix. Next slide. Okay. SEDAR 91 Caribbean Spiny Lobster
31 Base--
32

33 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Vance, I have a question.
34

35 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yes.
36

37 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Yeah. I got a question.
38

39 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Can we wait for the questions at the
40 end, please? Okay. Because there might be some answers already for
41 your question. Maybe.
42

43 SEDAR 91 U.S. Caribbean Spiny Lobster Base Model Run. These are
44 the management reference points from SEDAR 91 U.S. Caribbean spiny
45 lobster 's stock assessments for each island group. The values
46 correspond to base model run in the Saint Thomas/Saint John, and
47 Saint Croix SEDAR 91 assessment reports. All the values in this
48 table are in pounds whole weight with an SPR30%. This is the

1 spawning potential ratio, which is the minimum limit reference
2 point for maintaining sustainable fish stock. And the F_SPR30 is
3 a specific fishing mortality rate. So, here are the values of the
4 management reference point. The maximum sustainable yield proxy
5 for Saint Thomas/Saint John is 130,230 pounds. For Saint Croix,
6 165,852. Maximum fishing mortality threshold, which is the
7 F_SPR30% is 0.243 for Saint Thomas/Saint John and 0.197 for Saint
8 Croix, U.S.V.I.

9
10 The minimum stock size threshold in thousands of eggs is the
11 following: Saint Thomas/Saint John, 2.082e7, and for Saint Croix,
12 U.S.V.I., 3.045e7. The spawning stock biomass for 2023, over the
13 SSB_SPR30 is 1.55 for Saint Thomas/Saint John and for Saint Croix
14 3.-- I'm sorry, 1.55 for Saint Thomas/Saint John and 2.83 for Saint
15 Croix. The current fishing mortality over the fishing mortality of
16 30% of the spawning ratio is 0.16 for Saint Thomas/Saint John, and
17 0.12 for Saint Croix, U.S.V.I. Next slide, please.

18
19 SEDAR 91 Caribbean spiny lobster, OFLs, overfishing limits and
20 ABCs for U.S.V.I. The projected constant catch, overfishing limit,
21 and acceptable biological catch values for spiny lobster for
22 fishing years 2026 through 2028 for each island/island group,
23 values are in pounds whole weight.

24
25 The constant catch limit of OFL for Saint Thomas/Saint John is
26 150,768. For Saint Croix, U.S.V.I., 210,977. And the acceptable
27 biological catch for Saint Thomas/Saint John, U.S.V.I. is 130,964.
28 And for Saint Croix it is 186,063. Next slide.

29
30 So, in summary, we can conclude that for each island platform,
31 Saint Thomas/Saint John, and Saint Croix, the results indicate
32 that overfishing is not occurring, and the stocks are not
33 overfished. And second, that the diagnostics indicate a consistent
34 and relatively robust model estimates.

35
36 Action items. Topic number three. Review of SEDAR 84 Caribbean
37 Yellowtail Snapper for Puerto Rico, Saint Thomas/Saint John, and
38 Stoplight Parrotfish for Saint Croix. Motion eight, which was also
39 approved, the SSC reviewed documents associated with the SEDAR 84
40 Stock Assessment Review and CIE reports for Puerto Rico and Saint
41 Thomas/Saint John yellowtail snapper and for Saint Croix stoplight
42 parrotfish.

43
44 In anticipation of a full SSC review of these stock assessments,
45 the SSC and the SEFSC Caribbean Branch discussed additional model
46 runs for the full review. The suggested model runs include: one,
47 exclusion of the NCRMP data. Second, further exploration in
48 parameter sensitivity to (with a soft prioritization):

1 selectivity; growth, including the possibility of using priors;
2 third, natural mortality; steepness; and equilibrium catch.

3
4 The SSC recognizes the limited capacity of the Southeast Fishery
5 Science Center to do additional runs in light of the prioritization
6 of completing the Puerto Rico spiny lobster stock assessment, SEDAR
7 91. The SSC will also look to the Southeast Fishery Science Center
8 analysts to determine the best exploration of uncertainty in the
9 above list, as they express lessons learned from the review panel
10 and ways to go about the above uncertainty explorations.

11
12 SSC meeting action items, topic number four. Kevin McCarthy
13 presented an update on the SEDAR 103 U.S. Caribbean Application of
14 Alternative Assessment Methods. During that presentation, the SSC
15 member, Jason Cope, asked if he could recommend a federal employee
16 from the Alaska Science Center to attend the meeting and asked if
17 someone from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center could attend
18 the National SSC meeting scheduled in January 2026 to be conducted
19 in San Diego. The SSC members, Sarah Stephenson[sic], asked if
20 relevant reference documents could be submitted to be distributed
21 to the S103 participants before the meeting.

22
23 SSC meeting action items. Topic number five. Research
24 Recommendations. The SSC made several research recommendations for
25 U.S. Caribbean spiny lobster for Saint Thomas/Saint John, and Saint
26 Croix to be submitted as part of the SEDAR 91 review. This is the
27 end of the presentation.

28
29 I added a whole bunch of other slides which I did not use, otherwise
30 I will be speaking here for a very long time, but they're available
31 for you. That's what I do in order to educate myself on all these
32 fisheries statistical modeling, mathematical things which I don't
33 really have a big domain on.

34
35 So, that's what I have. If there are any questions, please direct
36 the question to Sarah or to Kevin or to all of these experts.

37 38 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

39
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Tony.

41
42 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** So, I'm going to direct this to the
43 experts because I ain't. I see a couple of things here. Question
44 number one. I know in the last Council meeting you guys were
45 discussing bypassing a peer review process. Did the peer review
46 process oversee this?

47
48 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yes.

1
2 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Okay. The other thing that jumps out at
3 me is I looked at the back of the room, and I got some of my
4 fishers here. I know that this is how the scientists speak, but
5 all of us just step into the room and listen to all these acronyms.
6 Basically, it is like being traumatized in a way.

7
8 So, the thing is this. I think that sometimes we forget-- well,
9 let me rephrase that. Sometimes the scientists forget that a lot
10 of these people don't understand this language, the lingo, the
11 acronyms. We need to water it down a little bit so that some of
12 the guys in the back of the room-- because I know if I asked him
13 now, he would tell me that he don't have the slightest idea of
14 what is going on, --would at least try to grasp what is going on.

15
16 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Well, you don't really have to look at
17 the back of the room. You can look straight at me because I'm in
18 the same situation in many respects. I tried to define many of the
19 acronyms during this meeting, how they're used and in which way
20 they're used, that's up to the ones using the base models because
21 they are the ones that are the experts.

22
23 But regarding the base model, you have to remember that this is
24 the result of people in the back, you know, as well as other people
25 claiming for more information to make these ACLs, annual catch
26 limit definitions, as well as the ABCs because the SS3 model, what
27 it really does well is that it not only incorporates the life
28 history characteristics and the theories behind it, but it also
29 incorporates the environment, changes in the environment, as well
30 as real landing data which you provide us with, you know, to
31 analyze.

32
33 So, it's very complex. It's not a very simple process, and, yeah,
34 I'm not the one that can explain it to you in detail how these
35 models run. All I know is how why they're being run, and that the
36 information that they provide has proven useful since SEDAR 57.
37 Julian?

38
39 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras ,. I think Tony's first question was
40 not understood. He was asking if the lobster went through the peer
41 review process, which is the independent, outside of the SSC and
42 the Council. And it did not go through that process. I just wanted
43 to clarify that and then we can come back to that.

44
45 And then, as it pertains to his comment about the acronyms, I think
46 what we can request is if the Council can put together an acronym
47 list with its definitions and it can be sent to the fishers so
48 they can understand for those who have not been part of the

1 process.

2
3 We have Winston and Mr. Joe LaPlace here, and we have a couple
4 other fishers online. Shirley Ledee, I know Mr. Daryl Bryan is
5 trying to get on but having some difficulties, but some people
6 don't understand the acronyms. For us who have been involved for
7 a long period of time, we have somewhat of a take on what's going
8 on. We do get lost sometimes, but I just wanted to put that out
9 there.

10
11 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yes, Julian, thank you. The acronyms
12 have been put together with their definitions by the Council
13 before. I don't know exactly where it is laid out. I think it was
14 through one of the reviews of one of the SEDARs. I cannot remember,
15 but there is a table. Maybe Graciela can expand on that. And if
16 you can tell us how to find that table with the definitions,
17 Graciela?

18
19 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, there are a number of booklets that
20 we have put together so we can revise them and bring them up and
21 provide a copy to everyone. So, there is the National Marine
22 Fisheries Service glossary, I think it's called. So, there are a
23 number of things that we can bring to the table. Árida Ortiz has
24 been working on a more layman's term glossary for us. So, we'll
25 look through what we have and make that available.

26
27 In regard to the SEDAR--

28
29 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No, before that. We can send it. There's a myriad
30 of glossaries, a list of acronyms that we can send you. Right now,
31 just opened the page the guide to fisheries management from Sea
32 Grant has all the acronyms you can think about. I believe that the
33 other thing is acronym may have to be translated into Spanish
34 because some of the acronyms don't make any sense in Spanish when
35 you have them in English. That's a good point. We can send that,
36 distribute to everybody. And it will be also depicted in our web
37 page.

38
39 We will make sure that we have a pop up that when you touch a
40 button, the acronyms will be there. And by the way, acronyms
41 change. Graciela and I went a long time ago to a meeting where
42 they changed the law, and one of the scientists feared that we
43 went from a three letters acronym to a four letters acronym. It
44 didn't change anything. What we used to call MSY was another
45 acronym. So, the point is that this is dynamic. The thing is, Mr.
46 Chairman, that the staff will prepare the list, put it on the web
47 page, and as Julian and Tony mentioned, we will distribute it, and
48 make sure that everybody will get it.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have a follow-up from Tony and then Sennai.

3
4 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Okay. Okay. This is the problem that I'm
5 having. We have not had a peer review on this study. And to me,
6 that's like asking a judge.

7
8 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Wait. Wait. No. No. Let Graciela explain because
9 the process--

10
11 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Let me let me explain how it works. SEDAR
12 usually has a Center for Independent Experts where they contract
13 people from all over the world to do the peer review of the
14 assessment. However, in this case, the peer review has been
15 conducted by the SSC and the SSC by law is required to provide the
16 Council with the ABC, that's what you see on the screen. So, given
17 all the information that was provided by the Science Center, and
18 we do have stock assessment experts on the SSC and the input at
19 those meetings, the SSC is recommending to you that the ABC is as
20 it's shown on the screen for Saint Thomas and Saint Croix.

21
22 So, that is a change that will change the ACLs, etcetera, and we
23 have to come back to deal with the P*. You have to tell us how
24 much risk you want to take. But the issue was that at the time
25 when this was planned, the CIE review from external sources, the
26 contracts did not go through. They were not approved. So, that's
27 why it came to the SSC to be reviewed.

28
29 But the SSC serves as a peer review panel for the SEDAR 91 spiny
30 lobster.

31
32 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yeah, let me help on this. I once
33 requested or asked the educational program of the Council to
34 prepare a pamphlet where you have to explain every detail of the
35 of the algorithms that are being used in the mathematical modeling.
36 Very few people understand that. But you can prepare a little
37 pamphlet with pictures of different size of fish, explaining what
38 biomass is, explain in very simple way what the spawning potential
39 ratio means in all these analyses, and that can be done by
40 drawings. I remember I asked Árida, "Hey. This is very important,
41 not only for the fishers, but for myself."

42
43 I made that very clear that in order to translate all these
44 algorithms and mathematical methodology in simple ways, you don't
45 have to become an expert nor, pass a calculus two course or
46 anything, but very figuratively. I remember, the Southeast Fishery
47 Science Center had done this before in their presentations. I
48 remember Brad Brown was emphatic on this, and there is some

1 information available. Okay? It has to be dig dug out, but for the
2 purpose of these meetings, the SSC meetings and Council meetings,
3 that pamphlet which explains centrifuge, all this mathematical
4 stuff into a precipitate that everybody can at least understand to
5 some extent.

6
7 Because I guarantee you, you're not going to be understanding a
8 100%, neither me nor anybody except the real experts on base
9 models. Okay?

10
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The thing is that we don't want to go overboard
12 with this and that's the reason why some people have a PhD, and
13 other people don't have a PhD. I believe that what Tony and Julian
14 are talking about are the basic concepts. What is OFL? for example.
15 What is ABC? And what's the need for more? If the level is 150,768.
16 What is the impact on our fisheries? Have we gone above the ACL.
17 Are we below the ACL.

18
19 This P* and everything, we spent a whole week talking about the P*
20 with a bunch of scientists, right here, by the way. So, the
21 concepts that we need to explain are the basics that we use for
22 the management of the fisheries that we have here. If people want
23 to have more, we can tell them where to go and get the information.

24
25 So, at this time, for Julian and Tony, what are the specific things
26 that you would like to see explained in common terms that we can
27 address?

28
29 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Okay. Well, I think it's more complicated
30 than that, to be honest with you. Seeing that we have-- you're
31 saying that the SSC did the peer review on this survey. Correct?
32 Okay. That's like having a judge sit on his own case, and he told
33 them what the verdict is going to be. In my opinion, that's how I
34 am seeing it. And I'm sure if you ask the other fisherman there,
35 you can't judge your own case. This is actually a part of the
36 process for a reason. That's why the peer review was put into
37 place--

38
39 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. But--

40
41 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** --and not necessarily because of the SSC
42 doing it. You need independent people coming in and making that
43 judgment.

44
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. But that's not the case, and it's not true.

46
47 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Hold on. Let me finish. Because I think
48 this seems to be a problem where this became a money problem, and

1 then it became the fisherman's problem in my opinion. I'm speaking
2 from a fisherman's point of view. So, Tony ain't a Councilman now.
3 I can tell you how a fisherman thinks.

4
5 You cannot have a judge, in my opinion, sitting and judging his
6 own case. This is a process, and it was set up in a certain way
7 for clarity, so that everybody feels that this is clean. This is
8 a clean product. These other people agree with these findings,
9 and, hey, they're neutral.

10
11 There's no neutral party in this. The neutral party has been taken
12 out because the SSC has taken place there. In my opinion-- Wait.
13 Let me finish Miguel. I don't mean to cut you out, but just let me
14 finish.

15
16 I'm sure if I ask legal counsel their take on it, I might get a
17 different opinion. So, I'm going to ask legal counsel how they see
18 this process.

19
20 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** I would ask someone from the SSC, there Kevin
21 McCarthy, which I believe is online, to speak to this issue. But
22 from a legal perspective, there is no issue with what the SSC did.
23 It's in the regulations. There is no conflict of interest or
24 anything of that nature.

25
26 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Okay.

27
28 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Mr. Chair, you have John Walter, Kevin
29 McCarthy and Sennai.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay, Walter.

32
33 **JOHN WALTER, III:** Good afternoon, everyone. Sorry, I couldn't be
34 there in person. John Walter, Southeast Fisheries Science Center,
35 Deputy Director for Science and Council Services, for the record.

36
37 I just want to mention that the SSCs are really the independent
38 science body that reviews the products and recommends, as Graciela
39 said, the allowable biological catches to the Councils. And we
40 really literally rely on those bodies for independent reviews. The
41 Councils rely on those bodies for independent reviews of that ABC
42 using the science. So, that happens at every Council.

43
44 Not every assessment is going to get the full CIE review. And in
45 this case, because the models were very, very little updates of
46 the previous models that were CIE reviewed successfully, the CIE
47 would have been reviewing about the exact same thing as before.
48 So, it would have been not a particularly useful use of time and

1 money.

2
3 That's really where the decision was made to say that this was
4 something that could go to the SSC directly because there were
5 updates. We can't unfortunately get CIE reviews of all of the
6 assessments, and we're being asked to provide more and more
7 information and more stock assessments and greater throughput. We
8 just can't do that with every assessment and every product getting
9 the full CIE review. So, in this case, the decision was made, to
10 have this be able to go right to the SSC.

11
12 Thank you.

13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Kevin?

15
16 **KEVIN MCCARTHY:** Well, I'm going to defer to John because he said
17 essentially everything I was going to say. Just to reiterate, this
18 assessment, SEDAR 91, was very much, an update of all the data
19 inputs from SEDAR 57, which had undergone a CIE review. So, there
20 were no fundamental changes in the modeling. It was really just an
21 update of the data inputs.

22
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai?

24
25 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah, so I just had a couple generalized comments
26 regarding this. So, the first thing is, is like the independent
27 expert panel, CIE, that is a step that can be in a SEDAR process
28 to review the data and documents that are used in developing the
29 models. But all of that still goes to the SSC, for review, for
30 them to recommend to the Council. Always. The person the group
31 that determines whether recommendation to make an acceptable
32 change in anything that goes through SEDAR that gets recommended
33 to this Council is our SSC. Right?

34
35 Their job is to do, like, technical and expert scientific advice
36 to the Council. If we do not feel that our SSC currently has the
37 people on it that can make that distinction, that is something
38 that we need to deal with at the Council. Right? We should be able
39 to have experts that are on that, that can make recommendations
40 based on the data and the information that are going in there.
41 Period. Because they trump anything that the CIE would put into
42 this review. It is their recommendation that comes to us, and
43 that's why those motions are there.

44
45 The second thing I would say is I really hear Tony's point about
46 understanding all the acronyms, the process, and the information
47 that is getting used to make these decisions. What I am hearing is
48 that from our fishers, we are not doing a good enough job of

1 educating them on the process and the information necessary for
2 them to help make these decisions at the Council level. We have
3 processes in place for them.

4
5 There's an outreach and education advisory panel. If we are not
6 putting enough information or resources through that to develop
7 the information that they need, we need to make that a priority,
8 and that is a decision that can be made here at the Council.

9
10 The second thing is all of these is prescribed processes. These
11 are rules and regulations that are set up both through Magnuson-
12 Stevens Act at the federal level, but also through our island-
13 based fisheries management plans. These are extensive documents
14 that have all the information as to how we process that, including
15 the acronyms for everything that gets used in this process in the
16 first five pages. They're all listed out.

17
18 So, if we need to take that information and create resources that
19 can help them understand it and use it to make clear reference
20 points on the decisions that we need to make, then we need to do
21 that. But we need to make a motion for that, and we need to put
22 the resources into that, and we need to tell the Council staff
23 that that's what we want them to do.

24
25 But we keep circling around the same issues without decisive action
26 on what needs to be done to address that. Okay? And I really do
27 think that it is not useful to have the same conversations without
28 clear action that we're going to take on. And so, I'm not voting
29 today. Right? I'm just saying this as EBFM TAP member, but those
30 are two recommendations that I think that we should take seriously.

31
32 The last thing I would say is a really good place to get a lot of
33 that knowledge and information are the marine resource education
34 program meetings that we've developed for the U.S. Caribbean.
35 Right? We were just trying to do one that was going to be Saint
36 Thomas Fisherman alone. They go through that whole process and
37 explains all of these aspects to you, and we couldn't get enough
38 fishermen to join it, so we had to cancel it, and now we're going
39 to a regional approach. Right?

40
41 So, I think, you know, we are doing things that are providing
42 resources to help fishers understand that. Maybe we're not
43 advertising it enough. Maybe they're not in a format that's best
44 useful. But I think we need to discuss that rather than talking
45 about a process that is literally already enshrined in rules that
46 we pass and federal laws that we can't change.

47
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

1
2 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record. Well, I disagree
3 with half of what Sennai just said, but I'm going to start off
4 with MREP, since we went there. The acronyms are included in MREP,
5 but the fishers have to participate in MREP. If they don't, the
6 fisher still needs to know what's taking place and understand when
7 rules and regulations are put in place. Not saying because you
8 didn't come, you don't need to know.

9
10 Something needs to be done for them to know. And that's been the
11 process from the very beginning. I've been involved for twenty-
12 four years. Twenty-four years, not two days. Twenty-four years of
13 this process. So, they need to be given a sheet that they can say
14 "Alright. These are the acronyms. If I attend a meeting, this is
15 what my homework is. To be prepared for attending that meeting."

16
17 That's first.

18
19 So, we're going back to the peer review. If the peer review
20 external review is not going to be done for an assessment, then
21 SEDAR needs to change what is said on their website. It clearly
22 states an independent peer review must be done before the process
23 is given to the SSC. I sat in the yellowtail and the stoplight
24 parrotfish, process. And what a what a big commotion that was.
25 Because what came out of it, that the information that was
26 presented was not useful. Because the models could not fit the
27 data. And that's a perfect example of having an independent survey.
28 It's an external set of eyes that is looking at the process and
29 the information that is provided to see if it can be useful or
30 not.

31
32 Guess who's at the end of the stick? Me, the commercial fisher.
33 When rules and regs and limits are put in place, I'm the one that's
34 taking the loss. You guys are not taking the loss. We are the ones
35 taking the loss. Okay? You see a perfect example of what just
36 happened with the federal shutdown? That's what happens to the
37 fishers when we are shut down. There's no money coming in. Okay?
38 That's a perfect example.

39
40 So, this is why if we have a process in place, we need to follow
41 the process. If we are going to change the process throughout,
42 then we need to put it in the guidelines. "Well, if we don't have
43 money to do a peer review, the SSC of that individual Council on
44 which we're doing the assessment for will be the one to conduct
45 the peer review." That's what needs to happen. Not just deciding
46 because, alright, we don't have the money today, so we are not
47 going to do it.

48

1 Lobster is our biggest fishery in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The
2 fishermen work hard for this. Okay? I wish my room was filled with
3 all my lobster fishermen today because it would have been an
4 uproar, but we don't want that. We want the working relationship
5 that we have had for the past few years, not to go back to where
6 he was twenty-four years ago.

7
8 So, this is all I'm saying. If we're going to do it, let's do it
9 the right way. And if we are not, just don't make decisions. "Oh,
10 well, this is what we're going to do." The fisherman will be right
11 there to battle you every step of the way.

12
13 Thank you.

14
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I have someone--

16
17 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Andy Strelcheck.

18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Andy?

20
21 **ANDREW STRELCHECK:** Yeah. Thanks, everyone. I realize, obviously,
22 people are very passionate about this issue. I just wanted to
23 emphasize a few things. So one, there is a SEDAR steering committee
24 that's comprised of myself and Clay Porch and Council directors
25 and other partners that meets twice a year. We are constantly going
26 through and updating policies and procedures and how the SEDAR
27 process operates. Now there's been a lot of criticism today about
28 the update and it not going through CIE review, and only going
29 through SSC review. But if you go to the SEDAR website and you,
30 pull up the SEDAR policies and procedures document, it'll clearly
31 indicate that updates go through SSC review. It does not say they
32 need to go through CIA review.

33
34 This is consistent with our process. This is consistent with how
35 other assessments are done in other regions of the Southeast under
36 the SEDAR process. And so, I feel like we're arguing about
37 something right now that has been in place for quite some time and
38 is very clearly documented as part of our policies and procedures.

39
40 I recognize there may be concerns with that. Certainly, Miguel or
41 others, if they want to voice those concerns at a future SEDAR
42 steering committee meeting, they can raise those. But in terms of
43 the process, we're very clear that updates can go through and do
44 go through the SSC peer review.

45
46 Thanks.

47
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Blanchard.

1
2 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** I'm not saying that anything is not being
3 done or-- well, let me rephrase that. I'm not saying that you did
4 not do a good job overseeing the decisions. What I'm saying is
5 when I swear-in this morning, I swore into upholding the laws and
6 everything else and looking out for not only the fishers and the
7 users, the people of the islands, and the Magnuson-Stevens Act.
8 So, I want to make sure that when I sit down here, and make a
9 decision, it's clear in my head as to what I'm deciding to, "Am
10 I'm making the right decision?"

11
12 Now, I'm not saying that the SSC group, what Andy just described
13 that oversees this, that they are hiding anything. I'm not saying
14 that. But what I'm saying is perception and how something look, it
15 may look a certain way and not actually be happening, but it's the
16 image that you're giving. I'm not the only one involved in this
17 fishery. When I have to go back and try to explain this to some of
18 the guys that will probably ask me, "well, how it went" and what
19 I think, I can't stay with a straight face and try to sell something
20 that I don't believe in.

21
22 Now, my personal take on the lobster fishery... it is overmanage.
23 We got the E.O. from the president trying to open fisheries, open
24 doors for the American market, and I think we end up contradicting
25 ourselves at times because instead of easing up on regulations, we
26 look like we want to add more. I will explain to you why now.

27
28 The lobster of fishery, in my opinion, is over regulated. For the
29 matter of fact, we have a three-and-a-half-inch carapace. If we
30 were in Florida, we would have had a three. So, these lobsters
31 that we had just catching, they just made size, in Florida, they
32 would have already taken them. The three-and-a-half-inch carapace
33 also gives way for the lobsters to bear their first eggs and
34 correct me if I'm wrong because I ain't a scientist. So, them
35 lobsters are three-and-a-half-inch carapace already bearing. You
36 got them in Florida, there's a three-inch carapace. So, in Florida
37 waters they would have been long gone.

38
39 The other thing is we live on an island and we don't export our
40 lobsters. We don't export our fish. So, when the season shuts down
41 and people ain't buying, we can't sell. And anybody that is in
42 business knows you don't go catch something you can't sell. It's
43 about moving money. It's about moving your product. So, for the
44 months that the island is basically and shut down on you, you have
45 to cut back on your fishing days. You have to cut back on your
46 activities. That's a close season on the lobster fishery.

47
48 The other thing is what continuously got me puzzled in the back of

1 my mind. As I remember years ago when I was the Chairman of the
2 trap reduction committee, and it was mentioned to have a study
3 done. Caribbean Council was lucky to get a study done. Now within
4 that period of time, I think this is the third study that we are
5 doing on the lobster. So, my question is here, is there underlying
6 reason for doing this? What are we looking for? Let me let me put
7 you in fisherman tongue. What are we looking for? Are we looking
8 for something? Are we looking to find something? That's like a
9 police officer pulling you over, "You have a broken light. Can I
10 search your vehicle?" "What are you looking for? You stop me for
11 a broken light." Is that the route we take it?

12
13 Because I'm behind the eight ball if that's what it is. I ain't
14 for that. So, if we go manage, we go manage sensibly. And when the
15 E. Order came down from the president, this ain't showing me that
16 we want to ease up on the regulations. This shows me that we are
17 putting on more regulations. And who is being regulated? Me, Mr.
18 Magras, Nelson, John, Winston, that's who's being regulated. I
19 think we got more regulations on us as fishermen than half of the
20 country got as a regular citizen.

21
22 So, I just want us to think about this approach and what's the
23 real reason for this? Coming back with another SEDAR assessment on
24 the lobster, which I don't think anything should be done by
25 lobsters. I think they should regulate the [inaudible] for the
26 mere of fact, we have to shut down business when business is slow.
27 We have a three-and-a-half-inch carapace when the lobsters are
28 already bearing. So, to the end of the day, if you ask me, and by
29 your own words, you say there's nothing wrong with the lobster's
30 fishery. So, tell me what we're looking for.

31
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Heather?

33
34 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thanks. Heather Blough here. I guess I just have
35 some clarifying questions for Tony about what the concerns are
36 about the findings of the assessment? Because from what I
37 understand, it's showing the stocks in good shape and the revised
38 ABC and OFL are still above what the fishermen are catching. So,
39 I wanted to better understand a little bit what the concern is.

40
41 I don't see this resulting in more restrictive regulations.

42
43 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Okay. Now let me cut you off. I don't
44 find anything wrong with it. What I do find wrong with it is when
45 we veer from, in my opinion, what the process is. To determine
46 that because of a money issue we're not going to go through that
47 hoop. That's what I have a problem with.

48

1 You know, the rules just can't change because you ain't got money.
2 At least I don't think so. You can't bend the rules because you
3 ain't got money. Because if the guy that was making a \$100 a day,
4 all of a sudden, he breaks down to \$50, and he go stealing something
5 out of the neighbor yard and the police catch him, guess what
6 happens? He's getting jailed. Do the rules bend for him because he
7 didn't have the money flow? I don't think so.

8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, no more discussions. Moving on to the next
10 agenda item. Graciela.

11
12 **ST. CROIX, ST. THOMAS AND ST. JOHN FISHERY SPINY LOBSTER**
13 **OVERFISHING LIMITS, ACCEPTABLE BIOLOGICAL CATCHES, AND ANNUAL**
14 **CATCH LIMITS - MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER / GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER**

15
16 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, I mean the next agenda item has to
17 do with what we were just discussing about the recommendation that
18 the SSC is making to the Council. Can I have, so there is no
19 overfishing, and the stocks are not overfished. That's the
20 conclusion of the SEDAR 91 based on the peer review by the SSC. If
21 I can have the slide of the--

22
23 So, the SSC is recommending for you a change in the ABC, which
24 will bring up and down the ACL depending on the uncertainty in
25 management that you have, because you have to provide the P*.

26
27 We had used, during this SEDAR 91, $P^* = 0.45$. And that will give
28 you the recommendations for the ACL. You have to approve the ABC
29 that we have provided from the SSC so then we need to make the
30 changes to the ACLs and that would become a framework amended

31
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Graciela, they have to accept the SSC
33 recommendation, unless they have a better assessment. So, what the
34 law says, and it's already in the MSA, the Council relies on the
35 SSC for this type of decision, and they already have that. So, at
36 this meeting, what you need to do is revise your ABC. From the
37 discussion that you have here, it will benefit the fishery. It
38 will benefit the economy so far. And that's where we are. So,
39 Graciela in--

40
41 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Can we have this slide with the table
42 and the ABC, please?

43
44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, Graciela, the question would be to accept or
45 not, by the Council, the levels of OFL and ABC, especially the ABC
46 that are presented here.

47
48 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** That's correct. Or if you have any

1 changes that you would like to make.
2
3 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No, do the first one.
4
5 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Okay.
6
7 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, you need a motion for that, Mr. Chairman.
8
9 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** One last thing. All the data that we
10 have available for the lobster that pertains to the U.S. Caribbean
11 was used. There's nothing else, nothing more that we can bring to
12 the table that will change this.
13
14 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, wait. Let's make a motion to move this,
15 otherwise we're going to be here until tonight talking about this.
16 So, the motion will be to accept or not the ABC recommendation,
17 OFL recommendation presented by the SSC. So, can somebody move it,
18 or we're going to be looking at each other?
19
20 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Yeah. I moved to accept the recommendations of
21 the SSC.
22
23 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** As shown on the screen that we have here.
24 OFL and ABC for Saint Thomas/Saint John and for Saint Croix.
25
26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Second?
27
28 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Can we get a motion on the on the board?
29
30 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Graciela, díctaselo poco a poco para que la
31 tengan. Liajay la tiene, ¿verdad? Graciela, while they do that,
32 anything else that you need the Council to accept at this time?
33 Sure.
34
35 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Hi. This is Sarah Stephenson. At the August
36 meeting, you did go ahead and make a motion for staff to start
37 working on a framework for the SEDAR 91. So, with that, I was going
38 to ask, would you like us to bring the same management uncertainty
39 buffer reductions that we've done typically in the past for the
40 species, which is no reduction? So, your catch limit would equal
41 the ABC or a 5% reduction or 10% reduction. Those are the ones
42 that we've usually done in the past. So, that would be my only
43 other question.
44
45 And if that looks good to you, then we would bring back those
46 numbers for you to look at based on these ABCs that you are
47 approving here.
48

1 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So that would be a follow-up to the motion that
2 they have at this time.
3

4 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** I don't think you need a motion for that. I
5 think you would just need a verbal vote. Like, if you want to do
6 a motion, you can, but at this point, it's more direction for
7 staff.
8

9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. But whatever we're going to do, let's make
10 a motion so everybody will be clear on the same page of what is
11 needed. So, we don't come back on April talking about the same
12 thing again.
13

14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Tony?
15

16 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Well, I will support the 5% reduction.
17 The 5% that you just said was on the table. I'll support that.
18

19 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Carlos, eso es para la segunda parte.
20

21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?
22

23 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Hi. Just to clarify. María López. So, Liajay,
24 was going to put in the screen the motion that was presented to
25 accept the recommendation of the SSC for the ABCs for Saint
26 Thomas/Saint John and for Saint Croix. I just wanted to clarify
27 that.
28

29 And then, what Sarah was mentioning is she was asking if the
30 Council was agreeing for the staff to bring an amendment for them
31 to review that would incorporate the same percent reductions that
32 were used in the past. No decisions to be made in here right now
33 just to make sure that you're good with those options that we can
34 bring to the Council during the next time. And then, when we bring
35 that with the evaluation, then you can make your decisions as to
36 what type of percentage you would like to apply to the ABC. Thanks.
37

38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And that's what Sarah was referring to. For that,
39 you as Chair can say, "the staff shall do this" and you don't need
40 a motion. That's what she said. So, the motion here will be to
41 accept the SSC recommendation and then for the record you can say
42 the staff is instructed then to follow what Sarah mentioned.
43

44 María, ¿está completa?
45

46 Mr. Chair, so now what you have on the screen will be in agreement
47 with the decision that has to be made today. So, we need to read
48 that for the record and then need a second, discussion and vote.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, the motion reads, "*Motion to accept*
3 *the recommendations provided by the SSC for ABC from SEDAR 91 for*
4 *spiny lobster for Saint Thomas/Saint John, and Saint Croix.*" And
5 move. We need a second.
6
7 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** So move. Second.
8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Second by Blanchard. Any further discussion?
10 Julian?
11
12 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** I totally agree with this here, but my concern is
13 because our landings have been below average due to the fact of
14 our market driven fishery that we have scaled back our harvest.
15 So, we are at a number where we use the average over 21 to 23 to
16 set this new allowable biological catch. My concern is that if we
17 do have a market demand and have a good season that we can harvest
18 more and we overrun that number. We don't want to see
19 accountability measures kick in.
20
21 And the reason why it's a perfect example is Puerto Rico. What is
22 happening to Puerto Rico due to the fact that when the allowable
23 biological catch and ACL was set back a few years, that I continue
24 bringing up at every meeting, it was set right there in that
25 meeting. We set in the number lower than can actually be harvested.
26 That's why they're in this situation there that they have been in
27 seven or eight times, that we know of. We're waiting to get a '24
28 and '25 numbers in place.
29
30 So, I feel that some kind of statement needs to be made in the
31 motion. We are accepting this, but if there's an overrun before
32 accountability measures kick in, we need to check why there was an
33 overrun. And I know that has been done in the past, and I think it
34 needs to be done for the Virgin Islands, especially the Saint
35 Thomas/Saint John Shelf.
36
37 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Carlos?
38
39 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yeah. Yeah. Julian, let me let me make
40 a quick interception here. Remember that the landings for 2024 and
41 2025 are provisional. That means that it may change, or it will
42 probably change. So don't take it as a dogma. Okay? Yeah.
43
44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** But I believe that Julian's point has been
45 addressed before, and it's a valid one. And actually yesterday,
46 when we're discussing this, we can discuss it again, and this is
47 a follow-up to what Sarah talked about. This is the number that
48 you accept now. It doesn't mean that the time that you get one

1 pound over that, you will immediately trigger an accountable
2 measure. When you get to that point, and, actually, this is part
3 of the process, you have to analyze why, what happened. Is this a
4 real change in the fishery? Is this something that merits
5 accountability measures? Those are the things that we need to
6 follow.

7
8 So, the Council is doing nothing here but propose to accept the
9 recommendations of the OFL. But in the record, we will also have
10 a discussion in April because you need to instruct the staff to
11 look at the same thing that you adopted in August. Look at this
12 fishery now and come back to the Council meeting in April with the
13 alternative. That's when you make a decision.

14
15 And the record today will show that there is a concern; that this
16 is not something set in stone, that we have to make sure that if
17 we get to a certain point that we have better data collected or
18 whatever, that the mechanisms that we have in place will allow us
19 to correct or modify whatever we have here on the table.

20
21 That's a very important point for the Council member and everybody
22 to understand.

23
24 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any further discussion? So, we're going to do
25 a roll call. I'll start on my left this time with Daniel.

26
27 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Daniel Matos-Caraballo, aye.

28
29 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Nicole Angeli, yes.

30
31 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Tony Blanchard, yes.

32
33 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Roberto Sabater, yes.

34
35 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, yes.

36
37 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Heather Blough, yes.

38
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** And Carlos Farchette, yes.

40
41 Any nays? Any abstention? *Motion carries*. I have a question on
42 this because I remember that for the Executive Order, Saint Croix
43 submitted a carryover if they don't meet an ACL. So, maybe this
44 would benefit the lobster fishery. If you're not meeting your ACL
45 to have that carryover for the following year, which would increase
46 your-- I'm thinking this is correct? Heather?

47
48 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** So, the carryover is a much bigger issue that we

1 would have to look at separately. I know that's one of the things
2 that is on the list to explore. That's something that would take
3 more time, I think, to figure out how it could be appropriately
4 applied.

5
6 To Julian's question, though. I do think that maybe when we bring
7 back the framework amendment in April with the ACL alternatives,
8 we have the OFL, ABC, and we'll have the five, ten, or whatever
9 percent reductions, we can also review what the AM is at that
10 point, and the triggers. Like, what information we would review to
11 determine if a corrective action is needed, so that it is very
12 clear to everyone exactly how that would work when we're making
13 those. I just want to make sure everyone has the information that's
14 on the books.

15
16 And just while I have the mic, can I have one more thing? I really
17 appreciated Tony and Julian's comments about the importance of
18 making sure that what we're doing is understandable to the people
19 who make an effort to show up, right, and listen and try to
20 participate. And also, Sennai's comments about we do have experts,
21 right, that can help us with that, with the O and E, Outreach and
22 Education Committee.

23
24 I did want to put forward a motion, if I may. And this can be fine-
25 tuned, but something like adding to the agenda of the next outreach
26 and education meeting, an item to look at how existing and new
27 communication tools could be applied in new ways to improve
28 fisher's ability to engage in Council decision making at meetings
29 and during public comment periods, whether that be some additional
30 real simplistic slides that we can include at the beginning of
31 some of these more technical presentations or the handouts that we
32 could have at the meetings, things like that.

33
34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** You can have a motion of anything that you want,
35 but I'd rather make a note to tell the committee, and actually
36 people who are in the committee to prepare a bulletin or any
37 material of the sort that would be able to convey these technical
38 terms in a way that people understand it and may be available.

39
40 But you are entitled to have a motion to make it clearer. So,
41 people will expect to have that in due time. And also, your motion
42 will guide us as to what you want in this material that we're going
43 to have. We have the social networks. We have the MREP, we have
44 the workshops that are put together by the liaison officers. And
45 in those workshops, we include everything there. We also need to
46 consult with the fishers because I usually talk to Julian and
47 everybody that has knowledge about this, as to the best way to
48 approach this. So, the motion will be something that will give us

1 some guidelines if you still want to go with it.
2

3 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Miguel, now I am remembering. It was
4 Jim Bohnsack. He prepared a set of slides for the fishers, for the
5 public in general, making drawings of what SPR means, what's
6 spawning biomass is, what is FM, and I do have those slides.
7

8 Something like that, similar to that can be rewritten or updated
9 for the general public and the fishers.
10

11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Actually, it wasn't James Bohnsack, it was the
12 other fellow. It's a booklet about all this in layman terms. That's
13 exactly the idea that I have. Just to copy it and bring it to the
14 outreach and education. But also, Jannette and I were talking about
15 the new dynamics with the social networks and the ways that we can
16 enhance that.
17

18 So, that was Bolton, the one who prepared that booklet. And you're
19 right, it's really, still, something that we can use as of today.
20 The things that he wrote there haven't changed.
21

22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, we need to complete this motion here?
23 Sabater?
24

25 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I remember when I went to Washington to get my
26 little training. They gave us a little piece of paper like this
27 that had all the acronyms and then right next to it what it was.
28 And we should have one right there, and then anybody who wants it
29 they can pick it up and use it. I need it sometimes.
30

31 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** So, if I get a second, I will help spell it out
32 on the board if people are interested in it. Okay. Okay. Let's try
33 this. So, *motion to add to the agenda for the OEAP meeting, a*
34 *request to look at how existing and new communication tools could*
35 *be applied in new ways to improve fisher's ability to engage in*
36 *Council decision making, at meetings and during public comment*
37 *periods.*
38

39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We need a second for the motion.
40

41 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Second.
42

43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Second by Blanchard. So, the motion reads motion
44 to add to the agenda for the OEAP meeting a request to look at how
45 existing and new communication tools could be applied in new ways
46 to improve fishers' ability to engage in Council decision-making
47 at meetings and during public comment period.
48

1 Any further discussion? Hearing none, all in favor say, "aye."
2
3 **GROUP:** Aye.
4
5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, *motion*
6 *carries*.
7
8 Next. That will be--
9
10 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, what you have in the agenda, it's
11 the Saint Croix, Saint Thomas/Saint John Fishery Spiny Lobster
12 Overfishing Limits, Acceptable Biological Catches, Animal Catch
13 Limits. You have provided us with the acceptance of the SSC
14 recommendations. Now the staff will be tasked to move forward the
15 framework amendment for Saint Thomas and Saint John.
16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So that takes care of that agenda item?
18
19 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Excuse me?
20
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** It takes care of that agenda item. Or we'll
22 still have to--
23
24 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So no--
25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, Okay. So, that would be María and
27 Graciela.
28
29 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** No. So, that's it, what I just said.
30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.
32
33 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Do you want to see it in a motion? Do
34 you want to task us in a motion, or do you just want to task us to
35 move the framework?
36
37 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** It was just a task. Yeah.
38
39 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Got it. Okay.
40
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** To what, Sarah had mentioned. Right? Okay.
42 Alrighty.
43
44 Next would be Accountability Measure Options for Pelagic Stocks.
45
46 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Mr. Chair, before we move to the next
47 presentation, is it possible to have a ten-minute break, please?
48 Thank you.

1
2 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** I'll second that motion.

3
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Let's do that. You'll second that motion?
5 [laughter].

6
7 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)

8
9 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We're going to get started again.

10
11 So, next on the agenda, Accountability Measures for Pelagic Stocks.

12
13 That would be María. Right? Okay.

14
15 **ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURE OPTIONS FOR PELAGIC STOCKS**

16
17 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Good afternoon. This is María López with NOAA
18 Fisheries. I'm going to be presenting and talking about-- this is
19 a topic that we started discussing during the past Council meeting
20 in August and is a modification of the accountability measures for
21 pelagic stocks under the island-based fishery management plans.
22 What I'm going to do first is I'm going to give a recap of what we
23 discussed during the August meeting and then talk a little bit
24 more about what are the expectations for today and then next steps.
25 If you can please go to the next slide, please.

26
27 Okay, so during the last Council meeting, we talked discussed that
28 our accountability measures for pelagic species and for older
29 species consists of a trigger, which is something that has to
30 happen for an accountability measure to basically be invoked and
31 what corrective actions that would be in the regulations in case
32 that accountability measure needs to be implemented.

33
34 Accountability measures are established to prevent the ACL from
35 being exceeded again and they are implemented when the ACL is
36 exceeded. So, the issue that we have with the pelagic species, if
37 you recall the pelagic species are new to management and we started
38 managing them with the island-based FMPs, is that the
39 accountability measures that are established for the pelagics,
40 different to the reef fish ones, do not specify a corrective action
41 when the annual catch target or the annual catch limit is exceeded.
42 If you recall from our reef fish and for the lobster fisheries,
43 when an ACL is exceeded and it's determined that it was due to an
44 increase in landings and other things that are included in that
45 regulation, NMFS will implement, in the case of reef fish and spiny
46 lobster, there is a seasonal closure. That's what we refer to a
47 corrective action.

1 So, for pelagic species, at this time, there is not a corrective
2 action that has been determined. In the next slide we're going to
3 read a little bit about what that AM currently is, how it reads
4 for the pelagics. So, we also reviewed that the pelagic species,
5 we have an ACT. An ACT is an annual catch target. This target we
6 basically use it to monitor when the, it was set at 90% of the
7 applicable ACL and a target below that ACL and it will provide
8 stability for the fisheries that fluctuate a lot around a target
9 catch rate. And that's why we have that ACT for this particular
10 pelagic species.

11
12 The reason, also, of why the pelagic species have a different AM
13 than the others is because of what we said, they're new to
14 management. We didn't really have consistent information coming
15 from the landings and we knew, at some point, that we would have
16 to begin looking again at the accountability measures and make
17 some changes, right? So, this is where we are right now.

18
19 So, one of the things that we also talked about is that, as you
20 all know, Magnuson-Stevens Act has requirements for all species
21 that are managed. They have to have annual catch limits, and they
22 have to have AMs, right? So, the need for determining or changing
23 or modifying this AM is basically to comply with these requirements
24 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and that's why we are revisiting this.

25
26 We also discussed during that time, and we'll talk a little bit
27 more about that later that maybe replacing the ACT with the ACL,
28 using the ACL instead of the ACT as the trigger, because as we
29 talked about during the August meeting, that ACT/ACL monitoring
30 process may not be serving its purpose for pelagic stocks based on
31 past monitoring when both ACTs and ACLs were exceeded. And this is
32 usually because-- I'm sorry, Miguel, yes?

33
34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** María, can you clarify what ACT and ACL?

35
36 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** The annual catch target and annual catch
37 limits. And I mentioned that, you know, the ACL is that level that
38 we set for the fishers, the harvest levels. And we said that the
39 ACT is set under the ACL and the Council decided that they wanted
40 to set it at 90% of the ACT.

41
42 So, the thing with the ACT and the ACL is that in the past, based
43 on past monitors, we have seen that for some species, both the
44 ACTs and the ACLs were exceeded, right? So, one of the problems
45 that we have with the use of the ACT is that we know that there's
46 no real time commercial landings available or collection of
47 recreational landings that are usable at this time for monitoring.

48

1 So, monitoring commercial and recreational landings to the ACT in
2 season, which will make more sense, is not really possible at the
3 time. So, one of the things that the Council may want to consider
4 in these modifications for the AM is perhaps getting rid of the
5 use of that ACT if it's really not serving its purpose and then
6 just might as well go ahead with monitoring to the ACL.

7
8 So, the second column that I have in here is some of the things
9 that we also discussed is that we have new size limits for dolphin
10 and wahoo and how they might help to keep harvest below the ACT or
11 the ACL and that's something to be seen, right? These are fairly
12 new. Understanding that we have set these new regulations, and we
13 still have to know how they are going to be restricting or
14 restraining harvest to the ACL.

15
16 We also talked about some options to change the trigger, the AM
17 trigger. It says what needs to happen to an AM for NMFS to implement
18 an accountability measure. We also talked about some potential
19 corrective actions, which are your typical corrective actions,
20 your seasonal closure or size limits, adjustment to the size
21 limits, knowing that we just implemented those size limits or
22 species that do not have size limits, etcetera. So, we talked about
23 all these things.

24
25 And then at the end, we also spoke about the challenges and
26 potential approaches that we could take, and it was a very good
27 discussion. Concerns were expressed about the corrective actions
28 due to the seasonal nature and low ACLs for some of the species.
29 As we all know, the pelagic species, they come in pulses, their
30 availability is very dependent to the environment. We also discuss
31 that the amount of harvest that occurs in the Caribbean may be
32 minimal compared to what may be caught in some other areas if we're
33 going to be looking at the wider Caribbean.

34
35 So, all of those things we have to take into consideration. We
36 would like for the Council to take into consideration when we are
37 determining what will be the best way to deal with their
38 requirement that we have to comply with for having an
39 accountability measure to prevent exceeding the ACLs. We also
40 discussed how the matrix process. The matrix, the evaluation of
41 the stocks that are currently being managed that Sarah will be
42 talking about later, could change how species, how we are managing
43 federally right now, and maybe a tool that would allow us to have
44 better data to revise those ACLs for some of the species.

45
46 Okay, so there's a relationship here. Many of these things are
47 going to be related to this process that is being conducted right
48 now through the matrix. And also, some of the things that will be

1 identified, hopefully will be identified on the SEDAR 103 that
2 Kevin was talking about earlier. And lastly, we all agreed that
3 the AM design must be biologically appropriate for the species.

4
5 Okay, so that's a recap of what we discussed during the past
6 Council meeting. So now let's go to the-- well, before we go to
7 the next slide.

8
9 So, what we would like to do here, when we are continuing this
10 discussion is to focus more on that trigger, then focus more on
11 what will trigger that AM rather than the corrective actions. We
12 wanted to be able to develop a trigger that allows to methodically
13 evaluate the landings exceeding the ACL. For example, is there a
14 way that would allow us to consider trends in landings, to look at
15 those pulses before making a decision as to whether to implement
16 that corrective action? So, we are also looking at the Council to
17 provide ideas on how we can do this.

18
19 Okay, so we have been doing a little bit of brainstorming, but we
20 are counting on you, because, again, this is an interesting one.
21 We're talking about pelagic fish and understanding their
22 seasonality and their biology, etcetera, how we can make this work.
23 Let's go to the next slide, please.

24
25 Okay, so this is the current accountability measures that we have
26 in our regulations for all islands, all sectors. The AM would be
27 triggered if the applicable landings, for example, sector and
28 landings as available, that will be for Puerto Rico, exceed the
29 applicable ACT for that stock or stock complex. ACT is annual catch
30 target. If NOAA Fisheries estimates that landings have exceeded
31 the applicable ACT for a stock or a stock complex, NMFS in
32 consultation with the Council will determine appropriate
33 corrective action. That's what we have right now.

34
35 So, those two things that I have in there in orange are the two
36 parts of this equation that we have to figure out, right? And the
37 part of the trigger is the one that I would like us to try to focus
38 more on. And then for Puerto Rico, as we know, when landings for
39 one sector are not available for comparison to that sector, ACL
40 and ACT, the ACL or the ACT for the sector that has available
41 landings is the one that will be for the stock.

42
43 So basically, right now we have commercial landings that we're
44 monitoring, and we don't have recreational. So, we are monitoring
45 to the commercial ACL for Puerto Rico. For the U.S. Virgin Island,
46 well, it applies to all sectors at the same time.

47
48 We mentioned that the ACT was established to address uncertainty

1 in the landings for this species, all of which are needed for
2 management. This is something, the use of that ACT, is something
3 that is consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act and the National
4 standards. And, those ACTs were set at 90% of the applicable ACL
5 and those right now serve as the AM. Okay? So, let's go to the
6 next slide. Next one, okay, that one. Thank you.

7
8 So, this is what we currently do. This is the annual catch
9 monitoring process. Step one, as soon as landings are available
10 each year, Southeast Regional Office staff compares each pelagic
11 stock/stock complex's landings to the applicable ACT. If landings
12 are less than the ACT, then no corrective action is required. If
13 landings exceed the ACT, then NMFS notifies the Council of the
14 overage.

15
16 There's a step two. Although this is not required currently by the
17 pelagics AM, SERO staff sends a summary memo listing those pelagics
18 stocks with ACT overages to the Science Center for review. And
19 next step, three, NMFS and the Council discuss and determine
20 appropriate corrective action, which is not predetermined in the
21 regulations. What that corrective action would be, we haven't done
22 it yet, right? So, that is not set.

23
24 So, the requirement that we have to do is that we have to set what
25 is that next step, what is that corrective action? Let's go to the
26 next slide.

27
28 So, we talked about some potential options last time. So, let's go
29 through some of those. And again, I will be happy to hear from
30 Council members if they have some ideas of how to do that. So as
31 usual, we have the option of not doing anything in terms of
32 changes, at least to the trigger.

33
34 So, let's talk about the trigger. So, the trigger right now, as I
35 mentioned earlier, is to evaluate landings relative to the
36 applicable ACT based on a moving multiyear average of landings,
37 which right now would be three years, the most recent three years
38 landings that are available for the stock. If NMFS estimate that
39 landings have exceeded the applicable ACT, NMFS in consultation
40 with the Council will determine appropriate corrective action. So,
41 this will be us not doing anything about it.

42
43 What's the problem with this? We already talked about the ACT not
44 serving its purpose. This one specifically says to use the ACT to
45 monitor the landings. The other thing is that we have to establish
46 a corrective action. We have had a couple of occasions where that
47 ACT has been exceeded. However, there's no corrective action has
48 been determined for that.

1
2 So, again, we want to focus on that trigger. This will be option
3 one, basically retaining what we have. Now let's go to the next
4 slide.

5
6 Okay, let's focus on alternative two here. So, this alternative
7 two or option two, potential option two, again, nothing is set in
8 stone. This is just an idea. So, this one would evaluate landings
9 relative to the applicable ACL, not the ACT, based on a moving
10 multiyear average of landings, three years, which that doesn't
11 change, it's the same thing that we have right now. If the average
12 landings, as estimated by NMFS, exceed the ACL, apply the AM. NMFS
13 will use the best scientific information available, including
14 considering landings, trends, and pulses to determine if
15 corrective action is necessary to prevent another overage.

16
17 So, this one, as I said, it does not use the ACT for AM monitoring.
18 It uses instead the established ACL for AM monitoring, which based
19 on past monitoring would make more sense. Similar to the current
20 AM, uses the multiyear landings for monitoring, which is an
21 average, which is better. But, adds a process where NMFS would
22 evaluate the best available science to determine if corrective
23 action is needed.

24
25 So, this alternative would allow for us to evaluate, for example,
26 if you have three years and you have one year that you have really
27 high landings, then we could take a look at those landings and
28 evaluate why, what is the reason of those landings. Is it for
29 something environmental, etcetera? So, it would give us the
30 opportunity to use the best available science to see if corrective
31 action is needed. Okay? So, the idea here is to try to do this,
32 try to focus on what really is happening with the landings before
33 there's a decision as to whether a corrective action, whatever
34 corrective action is decided later on, is needed, right? Hopefully,
35 this will be something that will help us understand better the
36 fishery, how the fishery is operating. And if for whatever reason
37 it is necessary to do a corrective action, it will give an
38 opportunity for there to be agreement, right, on why it's needed.
39 Because again, you know, the reason for having an AM is to prevent
40 the ACL from being exceeded again in the next year.

41
42 Okay, so option number three is basically the same thing, but the
43 difference is that this one is pretty straightforward. If you go
44 over the ACL, apply the AM, right? This one doesn't use the ACT,
45 it uses the ACL, similar. Similar to the other one, you're still
46 using the average, but it does not include a review process, which
47 may be more of a disadvantage than option number two.

48

1 So those are the two things that we have right now for triggering.
2 I think alternative number two or option number two really gives
3 that opportunity for evaluating the reasons why there would be an
4 increase in the landings, right? versus, obviously the other one,
5 where we're still using the ACL, but it doesn't include that
6 process, right? It's still a reasonable alternative, but you know,
7 it's up to the Council to decide what they would like to do. Okay,
8 so let's go to the next slide, please.

9
10 Okay, and here's the question. Do you have anything else that you
11 would like to suggest in here? So, we can talk about this later
12 after the presentation. We're happy to hear you. But it doesn't
13 matter what we do, I think something that we could include in here
14 is the Council should also periodically review and reevaluate the
15 system of ACLs and AMs and modify if necessary to improve their
16 performance and effectiveness. I think this is something that
17 covers what we all have been talking about earlier today. Okay, so
18 that is the AM trigger. Now let's go to the corrective action.
19 Next slide, please.

20
21 So, right now, what we have is NMFS in consultation with the
22 Council will determine appropriate corrective action, and as I
23 mentioned earlier, we have to determine what that corrective action
24 would be. However, what we're trying to do here is setting that
25 corrective action, but we really want to focus on that trigger.
26 Okay? So hopefully, we can identify what's going on with the
27 fishery and maybe there's no need ever to do a corrective action.
28 Right?

29
30 So, it will give us the opportunity to reevaluate what's going on
31 with the fishery. However, as I said, we have to do some corrective
32 actions. We have some potential options to consider. This is what
33 is in the toolbox. So, as they do in other regions for pelagic
34 species, they have seasonal length reductions, which is like the
35 reef fish, reduce the length of the fishing season for all sectors
36 by the amount necessary to prevent landings from exceeding the ACL
37 in the year following the determination.

38
39 If this was something that the Council would like to explore,
40 there's other things that they could do like with that. For
41 example, if there were to be a corrective action that it was a
42 seasonal closure, when should that be? Should it be a predetermined
43 short-term closure during a high season? Should it be a variable
44 time closure depending on how much they went over the ACL? Like
45 for example, December 31 backward or September 30 backward or
46 January 1. Those are things that the Council could determine, could
47 decide based on perhaps you can look at landing trends or the
48 species seasonality. What would make the most sense? Next slide.

1
2 The other two things that are usually in the toolbox for us
3 accountability measures and to control effort is adjusting size
4 limit, modifying the size limit for those species with one or
5 implement the size limit for those without one to prevent landings
6 from exceeding the ACL in the year following the determination. We
7 have to consider that we just recently implemented size limit for
8 dolphin and wahoo to limit mortality and protect fish prior to
9 reaching mature spawning sizes.

10
11 In Puerto Rico, we have other species that are being currently
12 managed, pelagic species, and the U.S. Virgin Island is just
13 dolphin and wahoo. Those species in Puerto Rico, they do not have
14 a size limit. Would that be something that could work out for those
15 species? We don't know, that will be part of the evaluation if
16 this is something that the Council will consider. And then the
17 other one is adjusting recreational bag limits or implementing
18 commercial treat limits.

19
20 Again, these are just options, modifying the recreational bag limit
21 for dolphin and wahoo or implemented a trip limit to prevent
22 landings from exceeding the ACL. Those bullets are just noting a
23 couple of things related to this particular one. We have recently
24 implemented dolphin and wahoo. We still don't know how that's
25 working out. The recreational limit will not apply to other pelagic
26 species managed under the Puerto Rico FMP because one was not
27 implemented before.

28
29 We don't have recreational data available for monitoring, so that
30 gives a big difficulty in this. This could be something both trip
31 limit for recreational bag limits that will be kind of difficult
32 to implement and communicate if there are changes annually. For
33 example, in the case that a corrective action needs to be
34 implemented, needs to be put in place, we will have to communicate
35 that for upcoming year, there would be a change in the recreational
36 bag limit, or they would be, you know, a commercial treat limits.
37 There are certain difficulties in the implementation of doing that
38 and communication, of course.

39
40 Obviously, this could lead to regulatory discards because when
41 there's a bag limit of a trip limit, whatever you cannot take,
42 you're going to have to return it back. Of course, the more
43 regulatory discards, the more it can increase fishing mortality.

44
45 Okay, so those are just a couple of options for us to be thinking
46 about. And then, let's go to the next step. This is not a long
47 presentation or anything. This is just meant to give a recap of
48 what we talked about last time, to bring some new ideas, to get

1 your input, with the understanding that these are very special
2 animals, right? That they are not reef fish. With the understanding
3 also that we do have a requirement from the Magnuson-Stevens Act
4 that we have to set appropriate AMs for the species. So, these are
5 the next steps. These are the expectations for this meeting and
6 the future. We want to discuss. We want to include your input. We
7 also want the Council to consider that there are other ongoing
8 processes, such as the stock evaluation, the new management
9 measures for dolphin and wahoo for us to decide when to further
10 develop this action.

11
12 And then, we have a working group. We have an IPT. There was a
13 motion during the past Council meeting to create an IPT. To
14 develop, we could, based on the input that we receive from the
15 Council, the idea would be to prepare an options paper for
16 consideration at the April 2026 meeting. I think that's all I have
17 for now and then we can open this for questions, for comments, for
18 input, etcetera. Thank you.

19

20

QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

21

22 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** María, before we get into the questions, what do
23 you expect from this meeting to proceed with what you need to do?

24

25 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Our expectation for this meeting, again, these
26 are potential options that we're presenting here that we are trying
27 to-- I know there's not a ton of options, but this one is a
28 difficult one. We are expecting input from you, if you are
29 agreeable with what we have in there, if you are not agreeable
30 with that, if there's anything that you will like us to consider.
31 And we don't really need a motion or anything. What we need is
32 once you kind of have an idea of where you would like us to go,
33 then we can bring an options paper for your consideration. No
34 decisions or anything, just an option paper for your consideration
35 in April.

36

37 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Follow-up. This will be for dolphin, wahoo, and
38 pelagic species.

39

40 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Correct. This is a modification for the
41 accountability measures for pelagic stocks under each one of the
42 management plans. Dolphin and wahoo are managed under the three
43 management plan. Those are the only two species under each one of
44 the Saint Thomas/Saint John and Saint Croix. And then, Puerto has
45 those two and several other species that are included in there.

46

47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you.

48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Blanchard.
2
3 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Well, I got a couple of options. I don't
4 know which one of them will fly, but they can put them all there.
5 As for the pelagics, I think we are mismanaging them, for the mere
6 fact that we all know that they're highly migratory. So, what I'm
7 saying is not that we don't manage them. We move them from the
8 Council managing them to HMS. Suggestion number one.
9
10 Suggestion number two where I see to be a problem, especially in
11 the Virgin Islands. We just currently came up with a recreational
12 program and I suspect that some of the recreational fishers are
13 going to be catching dolphin and wahoo, and they're going to plug
14 their numbers in, along with the head boats. Before when this all
15 started, and this was the argument on the table, we said we did
16 not have the information to move forward to put ACL in it. It was
17 pointed out to me that anything that the Council manages needs an
18 ACL. So, I see where we have a-- bring it back to the second slide,
19 the one where you gave the options. The slide just before the
20 correctives.
21
22 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** For the trigger or for the corrective actions?
23
24 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Just before the-- right. I think it's
25 the slide, I believe, just before the corrective actions.
26
27 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Another one. Another one. This one?
28
29 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Yes.
30
31 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. One more on the back. Okay. So, number
32 two.
33
34 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Yes. Number two. So, how I see this
35 playing out is this, because we don't have the information to back
36 the fishery, especially in the Virgin Islands because of how it
37 was monitored. We need something that is going to be able to be
38 flexible.
39
40 I think option number two is flexible where we deal with the, once
41 it is triggered, we look into why it has been triggered, and then
42 we come up with where the correctives would come in, as to us
43 starting out with after we figure why it is triggered. We come
44 down with a size limit. We increase that size limit for the next
45 year, for the next three years. We can't do that?
46
47 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** So, the action that we will be taking is for
48 the next year. It will be--

1
2 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** For a one year deal?
3
4 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yes.
5
6 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Okay. Good. So, we increase those size
7 limits for the next year, and then we come back to phase one.
8
9 Or if that does not work, then we go with a shortened season. The
10 only problem with the shortened season or the shortened trips is
11 that because this fishery is so unpredictable I don't know how
12 you'd actually manage that to determine how many days you would
13 take out of that fishing year. So, I think that would be the more
14 complicated route. So, I think by increasing the size of the fish,
15 that would be some kind of buffer, buffering system. How much you
16 increase in size? I really don't know. But I think that would be
17 the more adjustable way of dealing with that fishery.
18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian.
20
21 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record. Great presentation
22 by the way. But I see some issues and maybe, María, you and the
23 team can maybe try to create something out of what I'm going to
24 say that we can get up on the slide, if not today at the next
25 meeting.
26
27 So, you made a statement early in your presentation that maybe one
28 way to bring the levels down, the catch limit level down is it
29 might drop because we have just put a size limit in place. Well,
30 the issue what I see with that is because we put a size limit in
31 place, the fish that we're going to be catching are going to weigh
32 heavier. So, reaching the existing number right now can happen
33 even quicker if we're having a good season. So, I think it's the
34 opposite way around, and we need to look at that. And I think we
35 should monitor that for three years since our annual catch limits,
36 I think, reset every three years or look at on an average every
37 three years. I think we should look at that since we have
38 implemented these new size limits.
39
40 Another note that I made here is fish and wildlife gave out some
41 new licenses for line fishing. I don't know how many licenses were
42 given out, and if fish and wildlife have any numbers as yet on the
43 pelagic sites of what has been harvested. So, with these new
44 licenses, is this going to drive the annual catch limit over the
45 edge even faster? So that's another big one in the equation.
46
47 So, with that being said, monitoring of the catch per unit effort,
48 CPUE to see where that has increased or decreased within these

1 three years of monitoring that I'm proposing. And like Tony said,
2 we need now to look at the new recreational data because now that
3 will be also incorporated into the landings of these two species.
4

5 Because we're a market driven fishery, our market has been down of
6 what we can actually sell over the years. I want to say this
7 especially for the pelagics. What I have seen over the last few
8 months, because of the new tariffs that were put in place, the
9 companies here in Saint Thomas/Saint John that bring in the wahoo
10 and the mahi-mahi and whatever else, their numbers have increased
11 in price to the restaurants, the hotels, etcetera. So right now,
12 we are receiving more calls in demand of the fresh local product.
13

14 So, what I see happening there is it also goes back to the CPUE is
15 that the fishers now are going out more often to try to get the
16 wahoo and the dolphin because the demand is there this season.
17 That's what I've been seeing. So, that's another thing for us to
18 look at.
19

20 And last but not least, when we put together our statement for the
21 Executive Order, we asked that the dolphin and the wahoo be removed
22 from a managed by ACL species, but not that it goes away. We still
23 keep track of the landings. We keep track of what this fish is
24 doing and manage it right now through the size limits that are
25 implemented right now. I think if this Council would come up with
26 a three-year design out of what I just said, if it makes sense to
27 everyone, I think it would be a great starting point to look at
28 these two species especially, and then determine after that
29 information has been gathered, do we actually need to change the
30 annual catch limit? Do we actually need to still manage these
31 species? What we should do.
32

33 But I think right now, because of all that is going on, we don't
34 have enough information to proceed with an AM accountability
35 measure because we just had an overrun. Thank you. That's my
36 statement.
37

38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Crespo and then Tony.
39

40 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Nelson Crespo, for the
41 record. Well, Julian, you almost said all I had in my mind, but I
42 just want to add something. A regulation was recently implemented
43 especially for the wahoo and mahi, and all the fishing communities
44 are in favor of that. If now we are trying to apply or develop an
45 accountability measure for those species, what's going to happen
46 is that you are going to be promoting the imports, something that
47 we've been fighting for a long time.
48

1 I think that is not fair. It's not fair that when the fishing
2 communities support this new regulation, because they want to
3 protect the species, it's not necessary to put more rocks in the
4 middle of the road. You know? Because this is a pelagic species
5 sometimes, we get a lot of them, but sometimes the season doesn't
6 come because it all depends on the currents, where the food is.
7 Maybe if they turn and go to Santo Domingo or maybe they go to
8 Venezuela. They don't always pass through the same side. The
9 fishermen, commercial and recreational, are going to be penalized
10 if you pretend to implement accountability measure. And, you know,
11 the only people that are going to be in favor are the people that
12 import the fish to our islands. Thank you.

13

14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Tony?

15

16 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** I think either way you twist it or turn
17 it, it ain't an easy decision. But like I was saying, especially
18 with the new licenses that came out of recreational licensing and
19 the mandatory head boats that they have to also send in their catch
20 reports, these numbers will skyrocket. I don't see no way around
21 it because that was not being monitored before and now you are
22 asking all of this flow of information to come in. So, the only
23 place this could go is up.

24

25 What I'm afraid of is that it will come to a point here where we
26 are going to be over managing and over penalizing the user groups,
27 let's say, because we don't have the data to back what is
28 sustainable. That's what I'm afraid of. So, either way we twist
29 this or turn it, this has to have some kind of flexibility to
30 recognize that something else might be going on and it does not
31 mean that the fishery is in an overfished state.

32

33 To be honest with you, I don't see how-- if they are overfished
34 for the Virgin Islands. Okay. Let's see. Let's just put it out
35 there. Then, I mean, I have to ask if it is overfished for Florida.
36 And I will tell you why now. Because these fish are passing
37 through. They don't always, just like Nelson said, pass through
38 the same route. They follow the currents; they follow the bait
39 fish. They going to go where that carries them.

40

41 So, where you may have a season that is very slow, like I said,
42 this is not reef fish, reef fish is completely different, you might
43 have a season that is very good. So, you could be penalizing them
44 for something that they have just basically hit the latter one.
45 So, once again, we need to be very careful as to what route we
46 take if we are going to manage this species.

47

48 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you. Thank you all for your comments.

1 Okay. So, a couple of things. I have one question for Julian.
2
3 Julian, you guys, when you submit your landings, do you count the
4 number of fish or just the weight?
5
6 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** I would have to defer that to fish and wildlife
7 because I don't fish for pelagics.
8
9 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Okay. Then Sennai, please.
10
11 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. For commercial, they do pounds.
12
13 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** They do pounds. Okay. Thank you for that. So,
14 one of the things that I mentioned in the beginning is that there
15 has been discussion before about the ACLs that were set for the
16 pelagics. And one of the things that the Council was interested in
17 doing is precisely, with better information, revise those ACLs.
18
19 So those were some of the things that we're wanting to do. However,
20 through the matrix process, through this identification of the
21 data that it's available, what are the needs, and through all that
22 processes, the criteria, etcetera, the idea is that that will give
23 us better information so we can go-- one of the next step is to
24 possibly revise those ACLs to incorporate things that we know now
25 about the species that we didn't have before in terms of how the
26 fisheries are behaving and more landings information, etcetera.
27
28 Now one of the things I want to clarify with respect to the ACLs
29 is that for the U.S. Virgin Islands, we have one ACL that applies
30 to all the sectors, right? Because we don't have recreational
31 information. Now the recreational information is starting to be
32 collected and ideally in the future, hopefully in the near future,
33 there will be an opportunity to have sector ACLs for all fisheries
34 in the U.S. Virgin Islands.
35
36 So, the way that we are monitoring right now is we're monitoring
37 only to that commercial ACL, not to the recreational. So, if there
38 were increases or landings that are going to be collected for
39 recreational, those, at this time, are not going to be counted
40 against that ACL because we don't have a way of monitoring that
41 right now, that is not incorporated in there. So, the way that
42 this works right now, when the commercial sector reaches their
43 ACL, for reef fish, right, because the pelagic is a different
44 story, and the AM is triggered and it's determined that it was due
45 to increased reporting, then there's an accountability measure
46 through a corrective action that is implemented and closes all the
47 fishery, like for both recreational and commercial. So, that's how
48 it works right now.

1
2 So, ideally, like I said, this new information has been corrected,
3 this data that has been collected for the recreational sector would
4 allow, potentially, the creation of a sector ACL for that that
5 will be more reflecting of how that fishery operates. So, I think
6 that at least for right now would remove that risk of going over
7 the ACL, the ACL that is established right now, because of the
8 activities of the recreational sector.

9
10 The other thing I wanted to talk about is management of the
11 species. Species that are federally managed, which means that
12 they're included in our management plans, have to have ACLs and AM
13 as part of the requirements of the MSA. But they also have other
14 regulations like it was mentioned, some species have size limits,
15 some have trip limits, etcetera, etcetera.

16
17 If a species is removed from federal management, then those
18 regulations will disappear. So that's something that Councils
19 should take into consideration. We cannot have both things. You
20 are either managed or you're not managed. So, I want us to keep
21 that into consideration when we're thinking about removing species
22 and keep track of species. Because if you remove something from
23 federal management, at least from the federal portion, those
24 regulations will go away, with certain exceptions that Sarah can
25 talk about that later.

26
27 I think that's all I have. Thank you for your suggestions, Tony,
28 about the option number two. I think what you said is right on the
29 spot, flexibility. This species requires or needs a trigger for an
30 AM that would allow that flexibility, that evaluation of what
31 really is going on in that fishery, precisely because of the
32 seasonality, because of the variability on how the species are
33 going to be landed. So, any options that the Council may want to
34 consider should incorporate that flexibility in there.

35
36 Not having an AM, they have an AM right now, because they're
37 required to have an AM. It's just that we don't have a corrective
38 action. So, let's just take this opportunity to modify this
39 accountability measure that is required that better suits the
40 species that we are managing.

41
42 I think Heather had an additional comment that she wanted to
43 mention, Mr. Chair.

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Heather, then Sabater.

46
47 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thanks, Mr. Chair. María just covered so well
48 many of the points I wanted to make. I'll just, I wanted to

1 highlight a few other things that I heard from Tony and Julian and
2 Nelson. That was some really good input. I appreciate the
3 thoughtful input that you guys provided.

4
5 So, in terms of if we want to look at additional trigger options,
6 so the goal is to bring back in April, like kind of a robust set
7 of options to look at that you guys can explore. We'll look at the
8 pros and cons of the various ones and explore them in more detail,
9 and then at that point decide which we would want to move forward
10 on. Number two, where we had tried to develop one that incorporated
11 a little more flexibility based on, I think it was maybe Tony's
12 comment about the new, or no, it's Julian, the new size limit might
13 actually cause an overage, right? Because the poundage is going
14 up.

15
16 I mean, that might be one of the things that we want to incorporate
17 into including the considering landings, trends, pulses and the
18 impacts of new regulations, right? We could incorporate that into
19 one of the things that we look at in determining whether the
20 corrective action is needed. And then, I thought there was one
21 more here that I got out of there.

22
23 The concerns about the recreational data, right, increasing
24 landings. I mean, María addressed that. We also have baked into
25 here, I think, that same look that we do for the reef fish and the
26 other fisheries, that if there is an overage, one of the first
27 things we do and look to see is the overage caused by enhanced
28 reporting versus an actual overage. And so, even if those landings
29 did make it into the mix, that would be addressed there. So, it
30 wouldn't be an actual overage.

31
32 And then, Tony's idea about starting with increasing the size limit
33 first, and then maybe if that doesn't work doing a season, I think
34 that might be a modified option for the corrective action, the
35 suite of corrective actions in addition to just the size limit or
36 the season limit alternative, maybe we could incorporate some
37 combination there where we would start with one and only move to
38 the next if, for example, there was another overage right after we
39 did a size limit increase the following year.

40
41 The only other point I wanted to make, and then I'll go back to
42 you. So, we don't have the flexibility to not take action if we
43 exceed an ACL. If we exceed the ACL and we know that we exceeded
44 it because landings exceeded the catch limit that we set, then
45 we're required to do something. But we do have some flexibility
46 about how we do that and how we decide what to do. We need to put
47 the corrective action in place. But what we were really trying to
48 do is focus on the trigger so that that corrective action would

1 only be triggered when it's very clear based on the science and
2 stakeholder input that it's actually needed because there's a
3 problem in the fishery. And so, looking at landings, trends,
4 pulses, you know, are landings increasing because of the change in
5 regulations, things like that, would hopefully allow people to
6 have more confidence in any action that will be required when we
7 do take action.

8
9 And then, this is really considered, I think we're considering it
10 to really be interim action while we work on the species matrix,
11 SEDAR 103, and all these longer-term actions where maybe the
12 Council will decide to move the pelagics to the ecosystem component
13 species where they're just managed. We still have management
14 measures in place. Maybe there's a rationale to do that. Maybe you
15 guys will decide to take them out of the FMP, and we'll ask HMS to
16 pick them up. Those are all decisions that could be made through
17 the matrix amendment if we have the proper rationale to do that.

18
19 So, this is kind of like the interim action we take now to comply
20 with the requirements while those things are all being developed.

21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sabater.

23
24 **ROBERTO SABATER:** I have something I'd like to be clarified. We're
25 talking about the management of these species, and we have settled
26 on their sizes and settled on it. Do we have any idea or probably
27 we know how is this fish that goes from here all the way up there
28 and back to the Carolinas, how are they managed over there to make
29 sure that we're on the same page as they are on the management of
30 these fish, so that we are not either above, or below. Because
31 this is not a territorial fish. It's pelagic. Are we on the same
32 page as all the other areas?

33
34 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you for your questions, Sabater. Yeah.
35 They do have management measures in place. They're kind of like
36 similar or consistent with the measures that we have in the
37 Caribbean. Sarah's looking for the specifics right now, but there
38 are size limits and there's also of course accountability measures
39 with corrective actions. Those involve, for them, I think it
40 involves closing the fishery, again, with the same process, if
41 it's determined using the best available science as well.

42
43 So, this is not something new or very different than when it's
44 been done in other areas, of course. I mean, there's an
45 understanding that there's some flexibility done in here. There
46 are size limits too. Perhaps I think the biggest difference from
47 other parts of the region is the availability of in season
48 monitoring, which is something that unfortunately we do not have

1 at this time. Meaning that they're able to catch up, to keep up,
2 sorry, not catch up, keep up with the trends in the landings. By
3 doing that, they're able to make decisions more on the fly, I would
4 say. Versus in our case, we have a lag on the landing, sometimes
5 a year, sometimes two years. That means that we are making
6 decisions based on information, basically on yesterday news, if we
7 want to say it like that. But that's the best available that we
8 have. But we could have options like to, you know, if it's perhaps
9 unofficially try to see, look at some trends as well.

10
11 So I don't know, Sarah, do you have additional info? Thank you.

12
13 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Yeah, I have the regulations in front of me
14 from the South Atlantic. They manage dolphin and wahoo under a
15 fishery management plan for just those two species. So, they do
16 have size limits that are actually for dolphin, I think for both
17 species are smaller. Dolphin is 20 inches off of Florida, Georgia,
18 and South Carolina. So, they do manage it.

19
20 They have recreational bag limits. They have commercial trip
21 limits. They have the accountability measure that closes the season
22 if they've gone over their limits. So, they have a lot of the same
23 regulations that we have. They just seem to be more, like I
24 mentioned, commercial trip limits. We just have the annual catch
25 limits. They have those as well, but they have an additional
26 commercial trip limit.

27
28 So, they have a little bit more regulations for these species, but
29 their catch limits are much more much greater than what our catch
30 limits are in the Caribbean. So, they just kind of have a few more
31 regulations. I can show you specifics if you want to know, but,
32 yes, to your question, they manage it along the Atlantic Coast.

33
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

35
36 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras, for the record. I am having
37 some discussion here with my counterparts. I have a concern. You
38 know, I heard Tony's suggestion, but I have a concern with us
39 trying to raise the size limit if there's an overrun, due to the
40 fact that if you increase the size limit for the following year,
41 then those species or those fish will be released, and they will
42 go into somebody else's economy.

43
44 There's no guarantee they're going to come back to me next season
45 at a bigger size. Because I think pretty much from what I have
46 looked at is most of the rules and regulation in place in other
47 jurisdictions have a similar size limit to what we have. So, I
48 don't think that's an option that we should go with for that

1 reason. Are we going to release the fish here, and then it's going
2 to be allowed to catch in Florida. What are the chances of that
3 fish coming back in the next season as a bigger fish?

4
5 So that's a concern that I have, and Nelson and Gerson. So, I think
6 we need to look at a different option than that one. Sounds great
7 as an easy fix to an overrun, but I think we need to pay a little
8 bit more attention to the CPU effort and the market, especially
9 during these times that we are facing. I think it's a starting
10 point. And that's my comment.

11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more discussion? Good. Think we got
13 something to work with. I'm not sure what's going to happen with
14 this commercial fishing license that we're issuing now that they're
15 strictly for line fishing. You're not allowed to do anything else
16 for a commercial license, so we don't know how many of those are
17 doing reef fish, line fishing, or how many of those are going to
18 go out for pelagics. So that's something we all have to look at
19 also.

20
21 And maybe some interviews with-- I mean, when I go back to Saint
22 Croix, I can interview some fishers that are strictly pelagics to
23 see what kind of input they can give me.

24
25 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Gerson Martínez, for the record. I think a lot
26 of thought and a lot of communication took place to reach a size
27 limits for now to just come and change it out of the blue. I think
28 we should let that size limit, and those numbers run for a couple
29 of years, I would say three to five years, and then come back and
30 evaluate. Now is not the time to keep adding burden to our fishing
31 industry.

32
33 It's very hard. It's very pricey to be a pelagic fisherman. And we
34 don't need to put no more burden on the fisherman. I think we
35 should work with what we have right now in the books that we worked
36 very hard for a lot of years. This didn't happen in two years. I
37 think it happened, I think we've been talking about this for
38 probably fifteen, twenty years. Because I remember when you guys
39 first brought up pelagic fishery being regulated, we fought like
40 hell to prevent you guys from doing this. And now that we agreed
41 with what those numbers and those size limits are, I don't think
42 now is the time to change that. Not out of the blue like that.

43
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Heather?

45
46 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Just one more question then about the options
47 that we look at for corrective actions. So, right now we had size
48 limit, seasonal closures. I was thinking maybe we could add the

1 combo alternative with the size limit and seasonal closure, but
2 are there any other actions that you guys would suggest we
3 consider?
4

5 So, the intent of the accountability measure requirement is just
6 if we go over one year to prevent the same thing from happening
7 the next year. It doesn't mean the stock's overfished or anything.
8 The requirement is to make sure it doesn't happen the following
9 year. So, if we're looking at ways that we can, first, if we don't
10 expect it to happen again the following year, and that's what we're
11 doing with the trigger, looking at trends, pulses. If we don't
12 expect it's going to happen another year, under option two then we
13 don't need to implement the corrective action.
14

15 If we do expect it's going to happen the following year, then what
16 kinds of corrective actions would you suggest, outside of a
17 seasonal closure, that could help maybe bring down effort a little
18 bit to prevent that from happening?
19

20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Gerson?
21

22 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Nobody here can predict the future. I think we
23 have been telling you guys over and over and over. Mr. Magras
24 brought a big point, and I really agree with him a while ago.
25 Donald Trump raised the tariff on imports, and now we have the
26 potential to, not exploit, but to promote what Mr. Trump has been
27 telling us to do, local catch fish. And yet we're here trying to
28 prevent the fisherman from doing what our President has been asking
29 you guys for us to permit us to do.
30

31 We can do the job. But if you guys tie our hands and put us in
32 positions like this, this is going to continue happening. Then,
33 when these industries, that are importing, robbing the dollars out
34 of our pockets, because we have not been able to compete with this
35 industry until now that this opportunity has been given to us.
36

37 I think you guys should evaluate these numbers and see for next
38 year and probably the year after that, if these numbers keep going
39 higher or stay neutral or even, and then you can evaluate and say
40 we can go up with annual catch limits instead of cutting us from
41 being able to harvest from a fish that just passes through here.
42 It's not a reef fish. We are not hurting the resource this fish
43 comes through.
44

45 That's why we fought against regulating pelagics, because as I
46 said earlier, they are just passing through here. We have the
47 ability to feed the industry with a fish that is passing through,
48 but you cannot tie our hands now because probably somebody didn't

1 submit catch reports, or somebody submitted too much catch reports
2 to probably wash money. We've had those issues in the past where
3 drug dealers have been washing money saying they're catching
4 species that they're not even bringing to land, but we the
5 fishermen have been paying the-- What is the word I should say?
6 The consequences.

7
8 So, I think you guys should analyze this information a little
9 longer. When I say longer, I mean two, three years. Mr. Rolón
10 always says, "To make regulations it takes like two to three years.
11 That's the fastest you guys could do it."

12
13 Take that consideration, analyze these numbers again for a couple
14 of years and see if the fisheries are stable to keep producing the
15 resource for the Caribbean and the Mainland and United States of
16 America. But don't take drastic measures that are going to hurt
17 the conventional fishermen of these Virgin Islands. Thank you.

18
19 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I got Sennai, and then I got to move
20 forward.

21
22 **SENNAI HABTES:** I have a question, María. If the issue is that we
23 want to evaluate the other information coming in, can you not limit
24 it to commercial landings? Simple ACL where we come from commercial
25 landings, not taking in the recreational and go with, like, an
26 evaluation of those landings based on existing ACLs? Right?

27
28 The other option, it seems to me, are we able to have something
29 that we manage without a proxy for like a landings limit. We need
30 a proxy for MSY. Correct? There's no way for us to manage it
31 without not having something like an ACL, an OFL, or ABC, or an
32 ACT. That's in our rules. So, the only option not to have that
33 where we set something with an AM, or an accountability measure is
34 to say we're not going to manage it.

35
36 We decided that we're managing it now, so we're trying to identify
37 one that would be the most reasonable one, based on the information
38 we currently have. So, we can make a recommendation to remove it
39 completely from management, but then that removes our ability to
40 set limits on size and bag limits. And so, I think if that's what
41 you're recommending, like, let's recommend that, and then let's
42 evaluate that as a question for the Council to decide. If that's
43 not the direction we're recommending, let's identify an AM trigger
44 that fits best within the limits of the knowledge that we have.

45
46 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Heather?

47
48 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Yes. So, I think we could revise number two to

1 include, say, commercial landings, trends and pulses, right, to
2 get at Sennai's first point. And then, the second point, yeah, I
3 think that we can look at through the matrix amendment. Sarah is
4 going to be speaking about the matrix amendment next, and that's
5 the amendment we're looking at to decide which species we still
6 want to manage, take out of the FMP or move to ecosystem component.
7 And we can also look in that amendment at how we want to manage
8 any changes that we might want to make to the pelagics there.

9
10 But as long as they are in the fishery management plan as managed
11 species, then they do need to have the catch limits and
12 accountability measures and all of these regulations' requirements
13 applied.

14
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Just to be clear, you're talking about including
16 an option for the staff to review of dropping the wahoo and dolphin
17 from fishery management?

18
19 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Not in this amendment. That'll be part of the
20 matrix amendment.

21
22 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** But we were talking before to drop it from here
23 and send it to HMS. And by the way, HMS doesn't deal with this
24 little guys. So, we want to make sure what we are telling the staff
25 to bring to the meeting in April. So, María, do you have a clear-
26 -

27
28 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Yeah. I think we have kind of like a clear
29 idea of what we need to bring. I think it's clear, from this
30 discussion, that the options that we will provide, they have to be
31 flexible to accommodate for the particularities of the species.
32 Something like alternative two will be something, will be an option
33 that seems palatable. I mean, we can definitely explain more what
34 that means, what are the kind of things that we will be looking
35 at, etcetera, and how the process would take place.

36
37 And in terms of corrective actions, we can certainly bring back
38 all of these options with pros and cons. I mean, Council members
39 have provided some input on some of these corrective actions. Also,
40 DAP Chairs provided some input as well. We appreciate all that
41 feedback and that's actually part of the evaluation. Let's do some
42 pros and cons so that the Council can make an informed decision as
43 to what do they like to include in an amendment for an alternative.

44
45 I think this is good. This is where we wanted to go. I mean, have
46 a requirement, we'll deal with this. We understand, like I said in
47 the beginning, we understand the issue with the ACL. We understand
48 that there's going to be some changes in the fishery precisely

1 because we're now collecting recreational data. So that's
2 something that will need to be addressed at some point.

3
4 We understand the need for having better reporting, etcetera. We
5 can certainly request information from the territories about if
6 there are new licenses or how many fishers are fishing right now,
7 which is something that we include when we do our analysis. So,
8 we'll do the best we can in getting this information and bringing
9 it back to the Council so they can-- The idea will be to bring an
10 options paper for this and get input.

11
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I suggest, Mr. Chairman, that you stop here and
13 let the staff work. Then, by the spring meeting, we will be able
14 then to see the different option, taking into consideration the
15 discussion.

16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, one more point from Julia, and I will
18 move to Sarah's presentation.

19
20 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** I have a question. Julian Magras, for the record.
21 I have a question and then an option. So, my question is, do we
22 have a timeline on when the decisions would be made on the
23 Executive Order-- How do I put it? The different DAP's
24 presentations, what will be the outcome from those presentations
25 and what would we what would we like to see? Do we have a timeline
26 on when those decisions would be made?

27
28 And then again, my counterparts, another option would be no action.

29
30 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman.

31
32 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, the information that has come from
33 the ad hoc?

34
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah, the first part, we have to wait until after
36 December 15 because they opened the comment period for another two
37 weeks. And then, we will see from discussion with NOAA Fisheries
38 in Washington, they will send to all the Councils the feedback and
39 the next steps. In the meantime, the Council are expected to keep
40 working as we are doing here with the matrix that Sarah put
41 together and the management measure that we need to move forward.
42 So, that's where we are regarding the 14276.

43
44 Okay. Now we go to Sarah.

45
46 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Hi, Sarah Stephenson. To answer Julian's
47 question about the timeline. What I was hoping for the matrix
48 present presentation, between now and April is that the planning

1 team would really flush out what we're going to discuss today and
2 bring back to you what that looks like as far as the species
3 managed. Then, one of the things I would like to do is compare
4 that to what the DAPs and the FAC recommended and that ad hoc
5 committee. So, kind of like show you what came out of the planning
6 team process for the amendment and how that compares to all the
7 other things that have happened in the last few months regarding
8 that E.O. So, that's kind of what I wanted to do.

9
10 So, you could see, okay, we recommended dolphin and wahoo come
11 out, maybe those stay in, and we talk about the pros and cons of
12 that. Maybe some of the groupers that I think you recommended could
13 come out, maybe those will shake out. And so, you'll be able to
14 line up your recommendations and how that fits with the current
15 draft options in the amendment, and then we can talk about that at
16 that point and say, "okay, we still want those to shake out. So,
17 what then could you recommend the Council do?"

18
19 So that's kind of what my plan was. But I don't have a timeline
20 other than you'll maybe see something in April.

21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, next on the agenda the Sarah for a
23 Matrix Review of Stocks.

24
25 **MATRIX REVIEW OF STOCKS - NEED FOR CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT -**
26 **SARAH STEPHENSON, NOAA FISHERIES/SERO**

27
28 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** I'm Sarah Stephenson from the NOAA Fisheries
29 office and I'm going to run through, hopefully, quickly, but not
30 too quickly, what we started discussing back in in August at that
31 Council meeting for revising the species that we manage. And Maria
32 kind of showed you this morning the why we're doing that. It is to
33 try to, you know, just become a little bit more efficient with our
34 federal fisheries management and really focus on species that are
35 caught, targeted in federal waters that the Council feels, based
36 on this list of criteria, really do require conservation and
37 management. Next, please.

38
39 So, back in August, we reviewed guidance which kind of walks you
40 through which stocks do need federal conservation and management.
41 So, the National Standards under the Magnuson-Stevens kind of give
42 you ten factors to consider, such as is it targeted by the fishery?
43 Are there adequate management at the state or, in our case,
44 territorial level? So, there were ten factors that we kind of ran
45 through. If you want a refresher, I think it's included after my
46 conclusion slide, we could look at that. But, basically, there's
47 ten things there.

48

1 Then, we also looked at the criteria that the Council came up with
2 when developing the fishery management plans for the three island
3 platforms. So, there were five of those, and they kind of were a
4 wide range. And we looked at those five and then kind of which
5 species lined up with each of those criteria just to kind of show
6 you that, for instance, there were a lot of species that were added
7 due to their ecological importance. So, anyway, so we looked at
8 all of those species, and I think, again, I have that as a reference
9 slide if we want to see that.

10
11 We discussed using what we at SERO put together called the matrix,
12 which is just a large summary of data that we have for each of the
13 species that we manage, almost everything that we could gather in
14 the in the few months that we worked on this between the April
15 meeting and the August meeting. So, it's just it's just a lot of
16 information.

17
18 We were thinking that we could use that as a tool to maybe if we
19 wanted to revisit the criteria, you know, like, what you use to
20 include species in your management plan, maybe we could give that
21 just a little facelift. So, we talked about the species matrix. We
22 showed you the list of quantitative and qualitative variables. So,
23 for instance, is it included on the current catch report form?
24 Maybe from the commercial landings for the last x amount of years,
25 how many of those landings were reported in federal water? So that
26 would be like a number versus the other one is a yes/no. So, we
27 looked at a wide range of variables in that matrix.

28
29 And so, at the August meeting, the Council did make a motion to go
30 ahead and start developing an amendment to revise those criteria,
31 which would then, theoretically, revise the list of species that
32 we're managing. We didn't get as far as we wanted to, but we did
33 look at, you know, what was recommended at that August meeting,
34 and we're bringing back some kind of criteria a little bit more
35 flushed out to review today.

36
37 We'd like to get your input and say, you know, is there anything
38 that you want to add? For instance, based on our last discussion
39 with pelagics, maybe we want to look at a criterion that's specific
40 to the pelagic species that we're managing, and maybe we draft one
41 there. If the Council doesn't suggest that I probably still would
42 mention it to our planning team and just get their input because
43 it's a wide variety of sources, protected resources, habitat, you
44 know, everybody, giving their input. So, next slide, please.

45
46 We also talked about what what's the starting point for this. We
47 didn't want to open it back up necessarily to every species ever,
48 so we thought that we would just start with the stocks that we're

1 currently managing under the three fishery management plans. And
2 then, the first criteria really easy could be, we would keep
3 managing it if they are currently classified as overfished. That
4 was one of the criteria we showed back in August, but it's an
5 important one. And so, it's easy enough. There's only a handful of
6 species that are currently classified as overfished, so those would
7 come in.

8
9 The next kind of criteria to consider is retain stocks that are
10 predominantly caught in federal waters. And here are just two
11 examples. For example, if 50% or more of what's reported are
12 reported in federal landings, you keep those species. And then, an
13 even higher number is 75. So, the 75 would probably result in fewer
14 species being managed because maybe there's fewer species being
15 reported from federal water. So, those numbers in green, again,
16 are numbers that the Council can feel free to say, we don't like
17 those numbers. We want to do something different. In this instance,
18 there's only two. If you wanted to see three numbers, kind of like
19 a low, medium, and high, you could give us that input today.

20
21 From the August meeting, we had a similar kind of criteria, like,
22 just drafted, and we also had one that said, look at the ranking
23 of the species and where it fits. So, if a fisherman catches a 100
24 species, but their top three are, let's just do lobster, dolphin,
25 and red hind. If that's their top three, then we could come up
26 with numbers to say, "Well, let's retain their top three species
27 for fishermen." We didn't include that here because we thought
28 that maybe just using the landings themselves, which is the next
29 one, would maybe get at that. So, the third one is just look at
30 what they're targeting. And this, again, is going to be for what's
31 reported. So, it's going to be for all waters. And so, we came up
32 with just some generic numbers.

33
34 Maybe you keep everything that's 5,000 pounds or more. These are
35 all per species, individual species, or you could look at 10,000
36 pounds. I know sizes of fishes differ, so maybe this would be
37 something where you could give input. Like, that number would work
38 for this species, but it wouldn't for that. So that's the kind of
39 input you could give today. And, again, any of those numbers in
40 green, if you don't like them, we can change them. If you want to
41 see more or less, we can talk about that too. Next slide.

42
43 The next one we came up with was retained stocks listed as
44 endangered or threatened under the ESA. Right now, there's a
45 handful of those, again, that we manage currently that are listed
46 under the Endangered Species Act. And so, we could bring back, you
47 know, just the list. What does that list look like? And so, those
48 could be included and then you could discuss them.

1
2 The next would be consider removing stocks that are adequately
3 managed by the territories. We would have to define what does
4 "adequately managed" mean. We would have to talk about that. And
5 then, course, the Council and NMFS would really want to get a heavy
6 influence and input from both the DNER and the DPNR. So, we don't
7 want to just do things in our bubble. We want to make sure that
8 what we're doing meshes with what they're doing in the territories
9 and what they see in the future of their management. So, we would
10 really want to be very collaborative with the territories.

11
12 And then next, we put one in that says, "Retain stocks that can be
13 adequately monitored or assessed." We're still going to have to
14 kind of define that, but really what that's trying to get at is,
15 is there a current data collection program in place, or is there
16 a feasible method or reason to collect that data? So, we've talked
17 about in the past and kind of currently how we don't really have
18 recreational data. We know we want that data. There was a process,
19 a program in place in Puerto Rico in the past, so we know it's
20 feasible. We just need to find funds and time and to get that
21 implemented. And obviously, U.S.V.I., I think, and even DPNR in
22 Puerto Rico, they are making headway on that. It's just not in
23 place yet for us to get all of the alphabet soup numbers, but we're
24 working toward it.

25
26 So, we would want to retain species that are important to sectors
27 that even if we don't have the data now, we could easily maybe get
28 it in the future. So that's kind of what that means. The nice thing
29 about the timing of this, doing this matrix amendment now is that
30 it's going hand in hand with the Science Center's lead up to SEDAR
31 103, the process that they're looking at there. It also will
32 benefit from their data triage that they've done in the past, which
33 is gathering all the data types and links that we have for our
34 species. So, we also want to collaborate, work with the Science
35 Center closely on this one, we have been so far. Next.

36
37 And then, we've talked a little bit today about ecosystem component
38 species. We did talk about it back in August. And as this process
39 develops, we would like to look at some of those species that are
40 truly ecologically important, corals, urchins, some of your
41 parrotfish. They perform a service to the reef. They're very
42 important. We wouldn't want them to get decimated to the point
43 where your reef suffers.

44
45 So, we know there's species out there that would fall under this
46 category, and there is the potential under the MSA to classify
47 those as ecosystem component species. So, what we need to do is
48 look a little bit deeper at what other regions have done. We've

1 started that process. For instance, the Pacific Islands have some,
2 they actually moved a lot of their species to ecosystem component.
3 They manage a lot of corals just like we do, and they moved them
4 all to ecosystem component. And so, that means that you don't have
5 to set a catch limit for them. You don't have to have an
6 accountability measure. But they're still included in the
7 management plan because in this instance, they serve a purpose for
8 the ecosystem, and so, they want to just keep an eye on them.

9
10 So, we need to figure out what this classification means for our
11 species. If we truly want to move things to that, why do we want
12 to move it? What are our options once they are moved? And so,
13 hopefully, we'll package all of that in the document that we bring
14 back in April and really kind of try to explain that more clearly.
15 If we move it to ecosystem, what does that mean for the species?

16
17 I will tell you that if we move, like, for instance, your
18 parrotfish in Saint Croix that has a size limit, if those species
19 were not targeted predominantly in federal waters and we felt like
20 they could be removed from the FMP, but we acknowledge that they
21 serve a very important purpose in the ecosystem, so we want to
22 retain them as an ecological component species, reclassifying them
23 would mean that we didn't have that size limit anymore. So, you
24 can't have the size limit if they're EC species. But you could
25 still move them to that, monitor their landings over time and if
26 a problem develops or the fishery developed or they became more
27 targeted in federal waters, you could move them back into your
28 fishery management plan. You could establish catch limits and
29 accountability measures at that time. And then if you wanted to,
30 you could put the size limits back on.

31
32 So, that's just kind of an example of ecosystem component species.
33 You're not you're not supposed to have other management controls
34 in place if they're in that category. So, I hope that helps a
35 little bit. We'll bring back a document that really kind of try to
36 explain that better and give you examples from other regions of
37 what they've done. And then, as it says there, so anything that
38 gets moved or reclassified, we would continue to monitor. And then,
39 yeah, if it becomes a target, we could consider putting it back
40 into the fishery management plan with catch limits.

41
42 We want to hear from the Council, are there any other criteria?
43 Like I mentioned, we could probably add something specific to
44 pelagic species. But I think-- next slide. It's probably my next
45 steps, I think. Yep, next steps.

46
47 So, along with are there any other criteria, either qualitative
48 meaning like just not based on hard data or quantitative that is

1 based on hard data that we might have. Are there any other ones
2 that you would like us to consider when we come back in April? Are
3 there any other thresholds? And that's what we're calling those
4 numbers that we had in green, thresholds. Any other numbers,
5 thresholds, that you would like us to consider, as I mentioned,
6 adding more, changing the numbers that were shown. Whatever input
7 you give, we'll take to the planning team.

8
9 And then, we also want to think about for the species that maybe
10 don't meet criteria for retention, are there any criteria or
11 rationale that we would want use or have in place for why we're
12 moving it to ecosystem component? We don't really need, I don't
13 think, rationale for if it's going to be removed. It wouldn't hurt,
14 but if we want to reclassify it as an ecosystem, we will need that
15 rationale. Yes, Miguel?

16 17 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

18
19 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I don't know, but I believe that we need to have
20 a rationale of why we are moving it. Because we're going to move
21 things into ecosystem just because it in the top of our head.
22 Because you have to make sure that species doesn't need management
23 because it's healthy, it's everything. But we have to make sure
24 that the Council understand that in order for us to move any
25 species to another component of the management like ecosystem, we
26 need to have a good rationale as to why we can do that.

27
28 And the other point is, it's bad idea if we move it into ecosystem
29 and then if we need to put it back. That doesn't work that well.
30 Because probably by the time you put it back, it is for total
31 closure because the fishery disappeared. We did that in the Gulf
32 Council where we tried to manage one species by looking at it and
33 then the National Marine Fisheries Service overfished the darn
34 thing because there were too many of them. So, they were
35 overfishing it during the study area.

36
37 That's something I wanted to include for the record because what
38 Sarah is saying here is that we need to have criteria for any
39 action that you will have in order to remove those species. Even
40 when looking at the 14276, we also have to have criteria that the
41 secretary can approve for us to move any species out of the
42 management, let's say, this case, management unit of the management
43 plans. So, Sarah, what do you need from the Council at this time?

44
45 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** So, are there any other criteria that you
46 could think of that aren't in here, that you maybe would want us
47 to consider how we filter the list of species that we currently
48 have to maybe something new. Something that wasn't discussed or

1 something that was discussed, but you would maybe recommend a
2 different way to do it.

3

4 And if not, then we will move forward with developing these
5 criteria that we showed here and how that actually filters, our
6 current stocks for each fishery management plan and bring those
7 lists. As I mentioned, also how they compare to the DAP suggestions
8 and the ad hoc committee.

9

10 We'll compare it to everything. We want to give you as much
11 information as we can so that when you move forward, you know, we
12 don't have to do a lot of backtracking.

13

14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

15

16 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, to the record. I think this is a
17 great way to look at it. I'm looking forward to the outcome of
18 this. Only thing that I would ask the Chairman, Carlos, is that we
19 dedicate enough time at the April meeting for discussion, because
20 this is going to take a little time to discuss. It's a large group,
21 a species we're going to be looking at. I would ask that we are
22 not rushed, that we can take our time. Some of it is going to be
23 easy, I'm pretty sure. Some of it might need a little bit more
24 collaboration and discussion among ourselves. So, I'm just asking
25 that when doing the agenda, if you could allow enough time that we
26 don't feel rushed to go through this here. Thank you. Okay.

27

28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Heather?

29

30 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** So just to Julian's point to help facilitate this,
31 this is partly a question for Sarah and María. So, we're going to
32 come back in April with the options paper, right? And are we
33 envisioning that options paper will have applied criteria that we
34 have here to the stocks in the FMU and we'll be able to show the
35 results, right? Okay.

36

37 Do we want to try to also crosswalk that outcome of the exercise
38 that Graciela has done with the DAP so that we can maybe show where
39 there are differences and, you know, how ours shook out relative
40 to the consequences of that exercise. And maybe that would help
41 set up a, if they're both in total agreement, right, like, maybe
42 that would give us a good set of things that we could move quickly
43 on, and then we could focus on the stocks that maybe aren't
44 aligning under each of the exercises.

45

46 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** This is Sarah. Yes. That was my intent is to
47 compare it to not just the DAPS, but the Ad Hoc Committee also did
48 a similar kind of process. Both of those where you can-- and what

1 I'm hoping is that if we go through the criteria, for the most
2 part, the DAPs and the ad hoc members are going to be happy with
3 how those two options shake out. They'll be like, oh, maybe the
4 75% in federal waters perfectly aligns with what they wanted. The
5 50% doesn't. So, they would just say, we prefer the 75. It matches
6 everything that we said. But I want to show that side by side so
7 they can see it and the Council can see it, if that makes sense.
8

9 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Yeah. Think that'd be great. And then I think
10 we're also interested in hearing from the territories maybe at the
11 April meeting in what species you guys might be interested in
12 taking on. Yeah. Okay.
13

14 That'll be good. Thank you.
15

16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Miguel? Yeah. One last thing, this has to do
17 with the workload. For the April meeting, we're shooting for the
18 April 22. And that information has to be given to the people at
19 least fifteen days in advance, so that they were able to read it
20 and digest it so they can come prepared to the meeting. Is that
21 feasible, Sarah?
22

23 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** If you tell me right now that I need to have
24 it to you fifteen days, then yes, it will be. If you don't tell
25 me, I'm going to just do it on my timeline. But yes, if you want
26 to, especially because this one would likely have a document as
27 well as a presentation, I will definitely try to get the document
28 ahead. The presentation I should be able to do as well because
29 I'll make it a priority. So, yes.
30

31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, we have a public comment period.
32 Anyone in the--
33

34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No.
35

36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** No. I guess not. Alright. Uh-huh. Meeting is in
37 recess until tomorrow morning at nine, and we have a closed session
38 for only Council members.
39

40 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** In ten minutes.
41

42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** In ten minutes.
43

44 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for the day on December 03, 2026.)
45

46 - - -
47

48 DECEMBER 04, 2026

1
2 THURSDAY MORNING SESSION
3 - - -
4
5

6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Good morning. Good morning. We got our
7 two minutes to start.
8

9 Alright. Good morning. We are going to get started. We are going
10 to do a roll call. I'm going to start with Cristina.
11

12 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Buenos días. Good morning. Cristina
13 Olán, Council Staff.
14

15 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Buenos días. Good morning. Liajay Rivera
16 García, Council Staff.
17

18 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Good morning. Maria López, NOAA Fisheries.
19

20 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Good morning. Tony Blanchard, Saint
21 Thomas, Councilman.
22

23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Carlos Farchette, Council Chair.
24

25 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Good morning. Buenos Dias. Heather Blough, NOAA
26 Fisheries.
27

28 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** Anne Kersting, NOAA Office of General Counsel.
29

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

32 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Good morning. Daniel Matos-Caraballo,
33 Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources.
34

35 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Nicole Angeli, U.S. Virgin Islands, Division of
36 Fish and Wildlife.
37

38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Miguel Rolón, Caribbean Council. Good morning.
39

40 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Graciela García-Moliner, Council staff.
41 Good morning.
42

43 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Jannette Ramon-García, Outreach and
44 Educational Advisory Panel Chair. Good morning.
45

46 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Good morning. Vance Vicente, SSC
47 Chairman.
48

1 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, DAP Chair, Saint Thomas/Saint John.
2 Good morning, everyone.
3
4 **NELSON CRESPO:** Buenos días. Nelson Crespo, DAP Chair of Puerto
5 Rico.
6
7 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Good morning, all. Gerson Martínez, Saint Croix's
8 DAP Chair.
9
10 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Good morning. Wilson Santiago, Puerto
11 Rico Fisheries Liaison.
12
13 **SARAH P. STEPHENSON:** Good morning, Sarah Stephenson, NOAA
14 Fisheries.
15
16 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Good morning. Martha Prada, IRA
17 Coordinator. Buenos días.
18
19 **DANIELLE BLACKLOCK:** Good morning. Danielle Blacklock, Director of
20 the Office of Aquaculture, NOAA Fisheries.
21
22 **NATALIE LORD:** Good morning. Natalie Lord, MREP.
23
24 **JAMES R. KREGLO:** Good morning. James Kreglo, Saint Thomas/Saint
25 John.
26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Online.
28
29 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Good morning. People in Zoom are: Ana
30 Salceda, Kiara Matías, Nicole Greaux, Ricardo López, Michael Funk,
31 José A. Rivera, Mich Walsh, Refik Orhun, Vanessa Ramírez, Kevin
32 McCarthy, Jesús Rivera-Hernández and Ramon McIntosh.
33
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Good morning, everyone. It's December 4th,
35 continuation of the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council meeting
36 being held at the Western Resort Saint Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands.
37 It's 9:05 AM.
38
39 Next up on the agenda, continuing the agenda from yesterday is
40 Martha Prada, CFMC IRA Coordinator.
41
42 **IRA UPDATES - MARTHA PRADA, CFMC IRA COORDINATOR**
43
44 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Buenos Días. It's my pleasure to talk to
45 you about the progress we have been making through the
46 implementation process of the IRA project for the CFMC.
47
48 So, overall, the Council received \$2.6 plus million. So far, going

1 into more or less the first years of implementation, we have
2 expended approximately \$716,000 U.S. dollars, as you can see in
3 this slide. This slide specifies the different projects, the total
4 amount awarded to each one and the amount that we have paid so
5 far.

6
7 Overall, we have been evaluating the implementation process of
8 these proposals or projects through two different main criteria.
9 One, is how the technical advance is going on. And by technical,
10 I mean the fulfillment of all the goals that were stated at the
11 beginning. And the second criterion is how financially we are
12 advancing with payments and everything. So, next slide.

13
14 I will start describing more or less a very small summary overall
15 information for all of the projects and how they are advancing.
16 The first one is referring to the educational project as we have
17 been saying in short name. The main objective of this project is
18 to develop a storybook. A storybook describing extreme events and
19 describing how dynamics are affecting the habitats and the fishery
20 resources associated and be able to pass the main messages to the
21 teacher communities around Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands
22 as well as the fishing community too.

23
24 So, far, through this project, four workshops have been completed.
25 One workshop means two parts. One part is involving teachers,
26 mostly science teachers. The second part involves the fishing
27 community. In Puerto Rico, we have completed the goal of going
28 through one of the main areas here, north, south, east, and west.
29 And so, in total, we have been more or less involving more than
30 around 100 fishers in total and around 75 schoolteachers.

31
32 The participation has been very productive. They have been
33 discussing a lot of topics. So, local community are expressing
34 their concepts. We are exchanging scientific knowledge with them.
35 And so, it has been a very interesting process going through these
36 workshops.

37
38 Our future work in the next three to four months is the development
39 of two workshops, one in Saint Croix and one in Saint Thomas. And
40 possibly another two workshops in Puerto Rico, in Vieques and
41 Culebra and that will depend on available resources, I mean,
42 financial resources. Because fishers are asking us to go there and
43 share and bring this information to them too. So, we are trying to
44 use the resources as most effective as possible so we can expand
45 the goals of this project. Next.

46
47 So, this second project deals with the dolphin fish, the movement
48 of the dolphin fish, information on the habitats and everything.

1 And so, through this project, some very interesting resources have
2 been completed so far. From the 15 offshore trips, 13 satellite
3 tags have been dropped and more or less a relatively intermedium
4 size individuals. More than 300 regular tags have also been marked
5 on different individuals throughout the Caribbean.

6
7 With this project, additional existing data is being analyzed. For
8 instance, Wes here, with the previous information has been able to
9 collect from 2002 to 2022 to analyze the spatial distribution of
10 the dolphin fish throughout the Caribbean. And so far, despite the
11 daily variability, so far, a seasonal pattern has started
12 appearing. And by seasonal variability, I mean that through fall
13 and winter, the range of this species, it appears to be small and
14 expanded through the summer and spring, which is very interesting.

15
16 Another interesting result from this project is how fast fishes
17 marked inside or outside the Gulf Stream are moving. So, the ones
18 that are marked inside the Gulf Stream move approximately twice at
19 the velocity of the ones that are outside. Right now, they also
20 started looking at the effects of the Mona Passage and the
21 Charleston Gyre and other very interesting sites where currents
22 maybe are affecting and how these are impacting the movement of
23 the species.

24
25 Additional data on sargassum and seawater temperature and how deep
26 through the satellite tags he is able to collect information on
27 temperature at depth, too. So, it's very interesting and for the
28 next couple of months, he is planning to do two additional trips
29 to Saint Croix and one additional trip to Puerto Rico and start
30 improving the analysis of the metrics now that more data is being
31 collected. It is approximately halfway through the work that was
32 proposed initially.

33
34 So, let's talk about another project. Through this project, a
35 climate vulnerability analysis is being conducted. In my previous
36 presentation, I mentioned that a total of 24 species were selected.
37 But now I am reporting to you that through the team, they are
38 collecting and updating the information on the literature. So,
39 each species now has a profile with updated information and the
40 databases for each species has been circulated within an expert
41 group that was identified throughout the region by species level.
42 With that preliminary information, they were able to prepare
43 special materials and did conduct an in-person workshop to evaluate
44 how the vulnerability expert was rated on all of the different
45 species following more than 12 different criteria.

46
47 So, the information is online. If you would like to have a look of
48 the details of that, I certainly can provide that. Right now, they

1 are evaluating because this scoring process is first presented by
2 the team, then evaluated by the experts, and now that the workshop
3 is concluded, a post-workshop evaluation is being finalized. And
4 they are ready to move to the second stage of the project, which
5 is the consultation with fishers.

6
7 Another project. This project is dealing with juveniles of queen
8 conch and nassau grouper. They are taking environmental data at 12
9 different stations from the Southwest Coast of Puerto Rico at two
10 depths, a more superficial one and closer to the border. So, they
11 have been, since the May this year, collecting very interesting
12 information. So, temperature and other environmental parameters
13 are being recorded for future analysis and to see if the habitat
14 characteristics are changing or not, or the degree of that change.

15
16 To complement the physical, chemical parameters measurements, they
17 are also conducting a lot of field surveys. In this field survey
18 they are quantifying the abundance and densities of juveniles of
19 queen conch and nassau grouper and then being able to future
20 present the combination of the biological changes and the
21 environmental changes.

22
23 Because they are focusing a lot of the reproduction of the queen
24 conch, this project is conducting and doing field surveys and
25 collecting data on the reproduction of the adults itself. They are
26 using a new methodology that is being proposed with different
27 experts here in Puerto Rico and presented at the regional level to
28 be adopted. They are following these protocols and then now 18
29 different field surveys are being conducted in order to collect
30 more information on the adult reproduction.

31
32 The future work for this project. So, they are also preparing
33 workshops to present preliminary results. They are meeting a lot
34 with fishers, with the community, they are interviewing people,
35 they are collecting information on their perceptions and how
36 people's perceptions plus information are aligned or not and the
37 result from this project. It will be highly interesting for
38 responding questions that usually are coming from fishers to the
39 Council.

40
41 So, these fishing regulations are being imposed on the results
42 with analyzing juveniles' habitat characteristics for these two
43 species that are on the recovery plans. They are aiming to produce
44 that kind of information. Next.

45
46 We have another interested project. This time is to prepare climate
47 vulnerability scenarios for management for two species, for red
48 hind or for a spiny lobster. So far, this is a process that is

1 clearly established and applied for a couple of sites in the U.S.
2 continent. And so, right now this process is comprised by eight
3 different stages.

4
5 In this project, we are halfway up the third step and started
6 looking at the initiation of the fourth stage. How those stages
7 are? First, collecting information and deciding on the variables,
8 on the dimensions, and what kind of information they would like to
9 analyze. In particular, for future scenarios, they will prepare
10 three different levels of impacts from environmental changes using
11 RCP recommendations for the minimum or aggressive changes.

12
13 And so, for future steps, they will try to finalize analysis of
14 the scientific data, also preparing for two workshops, one in
15 Puerto Rico, and one in the U.S. Virgin Islands, logistics,
16 material preparation, finalizing analysis of the data, generating
17 maps and everything. So that's being prepared and expected to
18 happen in the next couple of months. Next.

19
20 Finally, we have our interesting proposal project that is aimed to
21 be developed in the U.S. Virgin Islands mainly, but with emphasis
22 through the entire U.S. Caribbean. This project has been falling
23 a bit behind schedule, but fortunately we are now able to report
24 that the majority of the administrative challenges that local team
25 was facing at the beginning of setting up the project from the
26 administrative point of view, because doing contract is something
27 new for the Department of Planning and Natural Resources here. So,
28 they have to go through a learning process and setting up special
29 steps and special procedures. I've been informed that that stage
30 is now almost concluded, and implementation could start very soon.
31 Hopefully, by the end of this year.

32
33 So, to conclude my presentation, again, in red and in green,
34 positive things and challenges that we need to face. Majority of
35 the projects are moving along as expected. We have, through taking
36 data, with workshops, with interviews, gaining a lot of trust from
37 different stakeholders throughout the islands. So, Puerto Rico,
38 for instance, it's a very close collaboration with Puerto Rico,
39 Department of Education, and the teachers here are developing and
40 is very successful. Again, with fishers, we have been able to talk
41 to fishers, a lot of fishermen that we didn't expect from very
42 young people, ladies, men, and so, it has been very, very
43 successful. I guess it has been-- I can't find the word in English
44 now in my mind --but rewarding for us as a team behind a lot of
45 preparation to do this and to see the response from the community
46 is rewarding.

47
48 And so, there are still some challenges. Remember that in my past

1 presentation, I mentioned with the CEFI elimination team within
2 the Southeast Science Center, a lot of the computing capacity was
3 lost. The team were able to contact new partners such as NOAA AOML.
4 And so, for some parameters, computing and analysis is taking
5 place. For other parameters, we still need to find a way to
6 generate those linkages to be able to identify the sources of
7 important data and the computing infrastructure that goes behind
8 that.

9
10 Sargassum is the last point I would like to highlight. It's been
11 identified at all different stages throughout all the projects as
12 a main issue with different perspectives. So, we didn't expect
13 that sargassum would be taking such high prevalence from different
14 opportunities, different aspects. So, I just wanted to see how
15 this sargassum topic can be, perhaps, slowly better understood and
16 be able to be introduced in fisheries management in a way.

17
18 We are far from that stage, but we are now collecting data,
19 collecting perspectives and collecting suggestions. So, that's all
20 that I have to say for you today. Unless you have any questions,
21 happy to answer.

22 23 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Martha. Tony?
26
27 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** I just got a couple of questions and
28 probably statements. Going back to the red hind and the lobsters
29 Right?

30
31 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Uh-huh.

32
33 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** To that project.

34
35 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Yes.

36
37 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Could you bring it up on the screen
38 again? Okay. It says adapting to extreme events in U.S. Caribbean,
39 implementing a smart approach to ensure sustainable red hind and
40 lobster fishery. Let me fish in. Now my question is what is the
41 strategy behind it? Because I'm a little confused. How are you
42 dealing with it?

43
44 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** First, the project is about is to compile
45 information on the environment characteristics and be able to
46 extrapolate that current information or past information into the
47 future to perhaps predict on the three different scenarios if that
48 could impact, for instance, the reproduction of the species or the

1 movement to deeper areas in order for the species to find a
2 suitable habitat or responses. So, right now, we are in the process
3 of collecting that information, going through the different
4 modeling capacities to be able to apply then using the indicators
5 for environments that could be in the future on minimum changes,
6 on intermedium changes, or aggressive changes. So, it's trying to
7 understand what is going on the environment and how those changes
8 could impact the biology and distribution of the species.

9
10 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Well, this would be my strategy. If
11 you're preparing for the future, the future also entails what
12 happens on the shoreline, what happens above the shoreline. The
13 lobsters as well as the small fish, they start off close to shore.
14 Now, I do believe that at some point in time, especially with the
15 lobsters, they move with the sargassum just as well as other fish
16 and crabs and everything else. It's a moving island at sea.

17
18 For you to ensure the future, in my opinion, you have to deal with
19 what's going on in the shoreline. And if they are building on the
20 shoreline, they run off on everything else. That's destroying the
21 habitat that is creating the fishery. So, unless we address that
22 force dealing with the future, yeah, you could blame a hurricane.
23 I agree with that. But unless you control what is going on the
24 shoreline, this is a continuous thing. You don't get hit with a
25 hurricane every year. But I guarantee you we have building going
26 on around the island every year, every day.

27
28 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Yes, I completely agree. And for purposes
29 of my presentation, I didn't present to you the amount of
30 parameters that are being analyzed in this project. It's more than
31 25 and approximately 10 parameters out of those 25 are on land, on
32 coastal areas and on land. Because that includes, for instance,
33 the changes in salinity thru rainfall, the sedimentation, the
34 development of the coast, the modeling of the tsunami, inundation,
35 all of those parameters are being analyzed. I just didn't present
36 to you the details for each of the analysis that are taking place.
37 But for sure, they are taking place.

38
39 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Okay.

40
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Cristina, online?

42
43 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Vanessa Ramírez.

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vanessa?

46
47 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Martha, thank you.
48 Vanessa Ramírez, for the record.

1
2 Martha, thank you for all the effort that you have been doing.
3 From the people that participate in the West Coast, I had great
4 feedback from this workshop. And also, it's very important that
5 they become interested, and they want to continue supporting this
6 kind of workshop. So, I hope that you can find the funds and
7 support to continue this for the East Coast, especially in Culebra
8 and Vieques that we have a young generation of fishermen also. And
9 they are very interested in knowing more about the change in the
10 weather and all the things that can be participating in this.

11
12 So, thank you for that and you know that you count on my support.

13
14 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Thank you, Vanessa. Appreciate it.

15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Tony?

17
18 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** I got a question on your conch survey,
19 the conch and the nassau grouper. I'm just a little curious how
20 you pair one with the other one. And why I asked the question is,
21 I don't see where the survey of the conch and the nassau grouper
22 are in the same environment per se. Because even when I was young,
23 and we used to dive around the shoreline and everything, we have
24 never seen nassau grouper in numbers and congregation even if
25 there's juveniles.

26
27 The conch on the other hand is completely different. The conch you
28 will find in congregations. So, I'm just a little curious, you
29 know, as how you pair the two of them together.

30
31 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Yes. That's why in this project, they are
32 before going into the field, having a lot of workshops or informal
33 meetings and interviews with fishers because they are collecting
34 information on their young generation knowledge, but also on the
35 older generation of fishermen where they remember where those
36 juveniles were abundant in the past. In addition to that,
37 information from local communities, they are analyzing satellite
38 information that, for instance, the spatial distribution of
39 sargassum in the previous years.

40
41 So, they combine both kind of information to decide where to locate
42 the field surveys. The field surveys are not the same spots for
43 the different species. So, they choose one set of stations for the
44 nassau grouper and another set of station for the queen conch,
45 depending on the decision of where to place those efforts in the
46 field work so that it will be more effective. And they also have
47 the opportunity of having a team of experts that will go through
48 and review the entire process and choose where those stations will

1 be better placed.
2
3 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. No more questions for Martha. Thank you
4 very much, Martha.
5
6 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** One more.
7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Oh, one more? Yeah. Heather?
9
10 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Heather Blough here. I'm super excited about these
11 projects and how well they seem to be aligned with the work that
12 the Council's doing. It's not 100% to me clear like the expected
13 completion dates. Maybe that was on the first slide. But I wonder
14 if things like the dolphin work, you know, could be helpful to us
15 in crafting a more flexible accountability measure for dolphin
16 looking at, your future predicted trends or whatever that are
17 coming out of here.
18
19 I wonder if you could just speak to timing of all this and when
20 you think there would be information, like, ready for the Council
21 to start considering and working on some of-- same thing with the
22 spiny lobster one, like, do we have information coming out of there
23 that might help us take a harder look at why we might be going
24 over in some cases and whether any action really is needed based
25 on predicted future patterns?
26
27 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Yes. If everything keeps moving smoothly
28 as it's been so far, we expect to have more definite information
29 by, I guess, next December. These projects were three-year
30 projects. We are completing our first year of implementation, but
31 we have to complete everything by March 2027. So, really, next
32 year will be a hard year for all of the people involved in doing
33 this kind of work to finalize their activities. Because everybody
34 is conscious that there are no-cost extensions for any of the
35 projects.
36
37 So, I hope that by December next year, I will be able to really
38 present more specific recommendations for the Council to evaluate
39 the degree of integration of some of the results that we have been
40 collecting through the implementation of these projects.
41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María, and then Tony, and then I got to move
43 forward. Tony?
44
45 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Okay. My personal opinion, I think we're
46 looking at this. Not in the right way. And instead of speculating,
47 in my opinion, what is going to happen in the future, what we
48 should have is a plan, that if this does happen, this is what we

1 fall back on. The other thing is what I noticed here we see got
2 sargassum as a problem. And don't get me wrong, it is a problem in
3 a way. But I think instead of us looking at sargassum as a problem,
4 we need to look at it as what it is. Just like I say, it brings
5 fish across the ocean. It moves with the tide. It brings fish.

6
7 It brings crab. It brings lobsters. So, in a way, it is-- how would
8 I put it? It is essential. It is needed to keep bringing the stacks
9 into different areas as it flows.

10
11 The problem comes in when it comes on the shoreline that it
12 destroys everything on the shoreline once it's pushed ashore.
13 That's where the real problem comes in. Because once that's pushed
14 ashore, that's a whole different bargain. It kills everything on
15 the shoreline unless you get it out of there. But as for when it's
16 floating around, I don't see it as really being a problem. I see
17 that being an asset.

18
19 Because if you look at the sargassum when it moves, you will see
20 the small fish moving with it. You'll see the bigger fish moving
21 with them. You'll find that there's crab in the sargassum. And I'm
22 pretty sure the lobsters when they are tiny, they're moving with
23 a sargassum too.

24
25 So, our strategy needs to be, well, this sargassum ain't going no
26 place. So, we need to learn to work with it and see the benefits
27 that we could get out of it instead of seeing it as a problem, in
28 my opinion.

29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** María?

31
32 **MARTHA C. PRADA TRIANA:** Just to close. That kind of discussion is
33 always in our workshops coming in and coming in all the time. So,
34 I invite you to look at the Council's web page and look at the
35 bulletins from these IRA initiatives because we have been able to
36 summarize some of the perception and kind of discussions regarding
37 the, particularly the sargassum, but all aspects on the
38 implementation of the projects. María?

39
40 **MARÍA LÓPEZ-MERCER:** Thank you, Martha. And so, yeah, we recognize
41 the importance of sargassum as an essential fish habitat,
42 particularly for pelagic species. So, it will be very interesting
43 to see how these projects that are measuring sargassum influxes in
44 general, not as a nuisance, but as an essential fish habitat for
45 the species that we're managing, and how the information that may
46 be collected and analyzed in this project can help us to better
47 define the essential fish habitats for these species that we are
48 managing. So, that's one of my comments.

1
2 The question that I had for you, Marta, is regarding the timing to
3 receive the outcomes of these projects. You said that it could be
4 December, by December. However, are there any preliminary reports
5 or information that managers could use to make decisions, to inform
6 decisions that the Council has taken. I know this number is not
7 that far, far away. But do you guys have progress reports for the
8 projects that-- because just for these projects and other projects
9 that, for example, grants that NOAA Fisheries sponsors or funds,
10 we like to see where the projects are going and see if the
11 information that has been collected if we are able to use it during
12 the development of the action so that the Council can make more
13 informed decisions.

14
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We can discuss this later, but we have to advance
16 the agenda because we have a person at 10:00. Couple of things.
17 These projects have been reviewed and approved by NOAA Fisheries
18 and we have a schedule. We cannot deviate from that schedule. We
19 cannot add anything else that we have in the projects.

20
21 The information that we get from any of the projects has to be
22 authorized by the PI of each one of the projects. And remember,
23 scientists are picky about using information midway of the
24 projects. So, the instructions that we got is that all this
25 information will be available in 2027. If by next year we have a
26 component, of any of them, that can be sent to the Council to be
27 evaluated as best available data, don't forget that part. We have
28 to take it to the SSC, etcetera, the Center, and then it can be
29 used for managing purposes.

30
31 But we are mindful that the schedule that was approved to be
32 followed. I thought we had a meeting with Kelly Denit. As you know,
33 she's in charge in Washington about these projects. We are working
34 on time in most of the projects. So, what we are trying to do is
35 any information that we get, like the dolphin fish, for example,
36 we have been receiving information from them, actually I have it
37 in the computer. Once we have information that we can use, then it
38 will follow the process, SSC, etcetera, etcetera.

39
40 The modeling that we are talking about will give us a perspective
41 that we don't have now. We did that before, actually. We have
42 models that predicted the next two hundred years, five hundred
43 years of fisheries here. And at that time, we only had a couple of
44 parameters. These projects will allow us to have more information.
45 We cannot call it ecosystem, but we can call it environment. And
46 then that information will be sent to the Council for evaluation.
47 Has to be checked before by NOAA Fisheries.

48

1 So, we have the best available data. The Center will bless it and
2 everything, and it will become part of the tools. It will be
3 included in the toolbox that we have for it.

4
5 I suggest, Mr. Chairman, that we continue, but this is important
6 enough. You will have, in the schedule, at each Council meeting,
7 Martha is going to provide you an update on all of the projects.
8 And actually, I would like to take opportunity to thank Martha for
9 her excellent work. It's a lot. I mean, she's in the tip of the
10 iceberg, but she has been able to manage it in a way that I wouldn't
11 be able to do it. So, thank you for that, Martha.

12
13 Can we continue?

14
15 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** And Miguel, just to clarify. I think what María,
16 and I are thinking, like, if the data from the project aren't
17 available until late next year, it's possible that we could work
18 in a process into, like, the pelagic accountability measure AM.
19 So, in addition to looking at trends and abundance of dolphin,
20 pulses in dolphin, maybe we could also look at projections for
21 sargassum in the future year when deciding maybe we don't need to
22 trigger an accountability measure because we don't expect another
23 overage in next year based on what it looks like, you know,
24 sargassum is going to be doing in the future, if that kind of
25 stuff's going to come out of this. But like building in the process
26 part type could prep us for when the data is ready and then we
27 could apply the data once it's put it.

28
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Next, we have marine aquaculture
30 guidelines, Danielle Blacklock.

31
32 **MARINE AQUACULTURE WORKSHOP- DANIELLE BLACKLOCK**

33
34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah, I have to we talked to Eugenio Piñeiro. He
35 is the System Administrator for NOAA Fisheries. He is interested
36 in this type of project for the U.S. Caribbean, mariculture
37 project. He asked me to talk to Danielle Blacklock. She's in charge
38 of the projects. We came up with two ideas. One of them we mentioned
39 it before. We will have a workshop next year for mariculture, by
40 invitation only, and we are going to develop the agenda.

41
42 Danielle Blacklock here will give us a perspective of what we have
43 so far, in comparison with the Pacific. Then, at 10:00 we have to
44 stop for the presentation on the Big Fish. But then, we can follow
45 the discussion. We also have Evelyn Cepeda. Dr. Cepeda was a higher
46 [inaudible] order to look at the permits agency that you have to
47 contact if you want to have a mariculture project in the U.S.
48 Caribbean.

1
2 The good news is that we have a lot of people working in different
3 projects. We have Jose Rivera from NOAA Fisheries. He's our expert
4 on a aquaculture here. And Ms. Blacklock, myself and Rivera, we
5 will put together a strategy for 2026 and we will inform, probably,
6 at the next meeting, where we are in terms of this workshop.

7
8 **DANIELLE BLACKLOCK:** Good morning. Thank you for having me here to
9 talk about aquaculture. I may not get through all of the
10 presentation before 10:00, but we can always regroup and have a
11 conversation afterwards as well. I'm Danielle Blacklock, the
12 Director of the Office of Aquaculture at NOAA Fisheries. I have
13 experienced both in wild harvest and in aquaculture. Aquaculture
14 is where I sit now, but I spent the first ten years with the agency
15 on the wild harvest side. So, it's nice to be back at a Council
16 meeting, and I'm grateful for the opportunity.

17
18 I'm going to give a bit of a sort of where we stand in the world
19 conversation all the way down into the Caribbean, in eight minutes
20 or however many eight minutes I have. Alright. On to the next
21 slide. Oh, I can do it. Fabulous.

22
23 So, Americans eat a lot of farmed seafood. We eat \$15,000,000,000
24 worth of farmed seafood that's imported every year. We have the
25 largest trade deficit for a natural resource other than oil which
26 is seafood because we're importing so much farmed seafood. In
27 comparison, the U.S. currently produces less than 2,000,000,000.
28 So, this is an economic question.

29
30 The countries that we're importing our seafood from don't
31 necessarily have the same environmental laws, social laws, human
32 health laws, and on and on, where we have incredible governance,
33 you all are a part of it on the wild harvest side, that makes us
34 know that everything that we eat, that's American seafood, is
35 sustainable and safe.

36
37 So, this is a well-known graphic in the aquaculture circles. I
38 don't know if it says known more broadly, but-- Farm seafood has
39 actually surpassed globally the amount of seafood that is coming
40 from our oceans in wild harvest. It happened two years ago
41 according to the UN that there's now more farmed seafood than wild
42 harvest. That's incredibly important because our population is
43 growing.

44
45 There is no interest on NOAA Fisheries part to have farmed seafood
46 instead of wild harvest. That serves no one. The idea is to have
47 more seafood; to retain the wild harvest seafood we have and
48 augment it with aquaculture products.

1
2 So, where do we stand in the world? We have the second largest EEZ
3 in the world. We have one of the largest landmasses and we are 20th
4 globally in aquaculture production. Now, you can see China is the
5 long line on the graph and they produce more than the rest of the
6 world combined. Are we going to try to get past number one?
7 Probably not within our sustainability laws, within our other uses
8 of our ocean environment and our land use laws, it is unlikely
9 that sustainably we're targeting for number one, but we certainly
10 can do better than twentieth. I should also mention that we are
11 China's largest market. We are their marketplace for their farm
12 seafood.

13
14 So, the government as a whole has been looking at this issue for
15 a long time. I talked about that huge trade deficit. That's big
16 money. That's something that gets people's attention even if
17 they're not seafood people. So, these are a couple of things that
18 have come down the line over the past few years. One, I'm sure
19 everybody remembers during the previous Trump administration we
20 have E.O. 13921 which was all about promoting American Seafood
21 Competitiveness. You all were a participant in that. And on the
22 aquaculture side, it puts NOAA in the lead Chair for the National
23 Environmental Policy Act, and it tells us to create aquaculture
24 opportunity areas along with a number of other things.

25
26 In the middle there, you have a National Security Memorandum. Now
27 in these circles we don't talk about NSMs a lot, but National
28 Security Memorandum are not that common and NSM 16 was promulgated
29 in, I think, 2023. It calls aquaculture agriculture. That matters.
30 Words matter. They unlock doors in Washington. So, it calls
31 aquaculture agriculture, and it calls agriculture critical
32 infrastructure of The United States. Critical infrastructure is
33 another keyword. It unlocks doors. It unlocks funding.

34
35 And then over on the right, this is one of the many reports that
36 talks about food security is national security. We have to be able
37 to feed our people. We have to be able to have supply chains that
38 can insularly get food to American people. Everybody remembers
39 walking through a grocery store during the pandemic and wondering
40 if they'd see toilet paper, right? Wondering what food would be on
41 the shelves.

42
43 We have to know that we can give Americans enough protein to
44 survive, enough nutrition to be healthy and seafood is a big part
45 of that conversation when you start talking about national
46 security. The Department of Homeland Security recommended in one
47 of their six priority actions for food security, is to develop a
48 domestic aquaculture industry.

1
2 Now this is just a little crib sheet on that first executive order
3 that I mentioned of all the things that have been done. Really,
4 just want to highlight a couple of things so that you know that
5 they're out there.

6
7 One is that we worked across the federal government on all of the
8 federal grant assistance and financial assistance programs that
9 are available for aquaculture. There's a booklet of all of the
10 places where you might be able to find federal funding to start a
11 farm or start a research project about a farm. The other is in the
12 lower left corner there. We published a guide, again, across all
13 of the federal agencies of what does it take to get a permit. How
14 do you get a permit? That has been a long-standing question there
15 are so many agencies that govern our ocean waters, how do you
16 navigate that process? And that is another document that exists on
17 our website.

18
19 I'm going to dive a little bit more into aquaculture opportunity
20 areas in the future, but I wanted you to know that those two things
21 exist.

22
23 Now, we have another executive order. The President signed another
24 Executive Order 14276. Again, you all are participants in
25 implementing that. It talks a lot about wild harvest and finding
26 ways to make sure that we're extracting everything that we can
27 sustainably from our oceans. But one piece that I want to make
28 sure everybody is aware of is the call for developing an America
29 first seafood strategy.

30
31 Now, NOAA Fisheries has a seafood strategy a NOAA Fisheries
32 national seafood strategy that was written a couple of years ago.
33 I'm sure that you have been briefed on it. I like to think of this
34 as elevating that to government wide. What if we look at other
35 agencies and the portfolio of programs that they have to help
36 support our seafood industry?

37
38 We don't have a whole lot of ability to invest in infrastructure,
39 for example. But you know who does? USDA. USDA is told to work
40 with us on this plan, right? So, we're just starting to figure out
41 how we're going to craft our America First Seafood strategy, but
42 I think there's incredible opportunity, not only for aquaculture,
43 this is where aquaculture is called out, but it's also an
44 incredible opportunity for the seafood industry as a whole.

45
46 Alright. Now coming back into our homeland. NOAA's aquaculture
47 program. So, our legislative driver, or our largest legislative
48 driver is actually the National Aquaculture Act of 1980. We have

1 a law that says that we should have aquaculture in the United
2 States. It tells USDA and NOAA to do various things and, largely,
3 it creates an interagency committee where we all work together on
4 advancing aquaculture.

5
6 We have a strategic plan. It's the government. Everybody has a
7 strategic plan. I know that. But here are our four goals and what's
8 really special about this strategic plan is it's the first time
9 all of NOAA came together as a program under one plan. And what I
10 mean by that is our program actually sits in three-line offices.
11 It sits in the National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA Fisheries.
12 You all are familiar with NOAA Fisheries. In the Fisheries Service
13 we have folks in each Regional Office. I have the Office of
14 Aquaculture. We also have researchers in our Science Centers. But
15 there's also a component of our program that sits in the National
16 Ocean Service, the National Centers for Coastal and Ocean Science.
17 They do all our marine spatial planning and our mapping. I'll talk
18 about that a little bit. And then there's also the National Sea
19 Grant program, which I think you're all familiar with.

20
21 On the aquaculture side, they're largely an external granting
22 mechanism that has about \$13,000,000 in grants each year. But we
23 function across those three-line offices as one program. All three-
24 line offices are in my staff meetings. We all work together. And
25 under that strategic plan for the first time, we're all clearly
26 have stated our goals, and we're sort of rowing in the same
27 direction.

28
29 I'm going to give a little thumbnail on the research. You know
30 that NOAA is a science agency at our core. That's our mission, is
31 advancing science. Right? So, we have aquaculture research.
32 Actually, wet labs, growing animals and plants, better
33 understanding interactions of those organisms and the marine
34 environment.

35
36 I like to think of our science as falling into two bins. One, we
37 call tools for rules, understanding those interactions,
38 understanding how to make decisions about aquaculture. And then we
39 also have research to advance the industry. How do we make sure
40 that we can grow animals most efficiently on the best feeds? Those
41 kinds of things.

42
43 So, they are sprinkled around the country. As you can see here, we
44 don't really have duplication. Our genetics risk team that analyzes
45 if you're going to put a farm in this location, what is the
46 potential impact going to be to the surrounding conspecific stocks?
47 What are the genetic risks? That team sits in the Southwest Fishery
48 Science Center in La Jolla, California, but they are responsible

1 for the Nation. And that's how our whole system works is that
2 regardless of where they sit, they're responsible for the entire
3 country.

4
5 Research right here in the U.S. Caribbean. Through our granting
6 programs since 2019, NOAA has funded \$2,300,000 worth of
7 aquaculture research in the U.S. Caribbean. There you have a
8 picture of the conch hatchery, and the conch that is now becoming
9 a commercial company and on and on. That's been one of the major
10 investments, but there are other projects that have been funded in
11 the U.S. Caribbean as well.

12
13 This is the most exciting thing that has happened in aquaculture
14 research, and, I would say, maybe in the history of the federal
15 government. In 2023, I'm trying to get my years right versus fiscal
16 years, Congress asked through appropriations language us to create
17 a cooperative institute for aquaculture research and they gave us
18 additional resources to fund that cooperative institute. A
19 cooperative institute at NOAA is a term of art. It means a long-
20 term partnership. We have 13 of them.

21
22 The long-term partnership has a ceiling of how much can be spent
23 over the next five years and then a review will happen. If that
24 review is positive, then another five years can continue. Some of
25 you may be familiar with some of the various Cooperative Institute
26 that are around NOAA. They span all of NOAA's mission. Cooperative
27 Institute research is done to achieve NOAA's mission. So, it's a
28 unique partnership where we have academic institutions doing
29 research that achieves our mission.

30
31 We have finished the competition part, meaning that the competition
32 is closed for this new cooperative institute called CIFARM. CIFARM
33 is hopefully going to be announced this winter as the competition
34 is now in the review phase. Is going to set up this new cooperative
35 institute to research these five major themes that are on the
36 slide. One that I want to call out in particular is that last
37 bullet.

38
39 Certainly, demonstration and engineering and observations and risk
40 management, all of these things are really important. That's why
41 we put them in there. But seafood markets. As a Council and as a
42 larger group and community, I think that making sure that when we
43 grow aquaculture, we're not disrupting markets in a negative way
44 for the existing producers is incredibly important. This piece
45 will help us use academic economists because I only have one
46 economist. But we'll be able to use academic economists to answer
47 some of our biggest questions.

48

1 What if we bring this species online? What's it going to do to the
2 local market? How will it impact the fishermen? Can you make a
3 profit growing it? These are really important questions. And I'm
4 really excited that we're going to all of a sudden have this
5 untapped potential to have conversations with them.

6

7 And do you want me to pause here?

8

9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I just talked to Ana Salceda, and we can have
10 fifteen minutes that you can extend because this is very important.
11 So, she said that she is willing to wait. Please go ahead.

12

13 **DANIELLE BLACKLOCK:** Oh, thank you. Thank you. Okay. The other
14 major initiative that my team has been working on is identifying
15 aquaculture opportunity areas. I mentioned that it was called for
16 in that first executive order.

17

18 The idea of an aquaculture opportunity area is finding appropriate
19 space for aquaculture to grow. We have a busy coastal environment.
20 Yes, we have the second largest EEZ, exclusive economic zone in
21 the world, but that doesn't mean that nobody's out there. You all
22 are out there. I know that.

23

24 So, we've been looking for space that's appropriate for aquaculture
25 to grow in three ways. One, we want it to be appropriate
26 environmentally, ecologically. We need it to be out of essential
27 fish habitat, out of critical habitat for endangered species. We
28 also want it to be appropriate socially, meaning we're not getting
29 in the way of other users. We're not going to be in a shipping
30 lane. We're not looking to be in traditional fishing grounds.
31 Right? We're trying to find space that is not being used by other
32 users. And the third is that we're trying to find space that is
33 appropriate economically, meaning not too far from port. If there's
34 a processing center close by, even better.

35

36 Well, how do we find those places? It's a two-part process. The
37 first part is through marine spatial analysis. We use that NOS
38 National Ocean Service, National Centers for Coastal and Ocean
39 Science to develop atlases. These atlases contain hundreds and
40 hundreds of data layers. They're literally as thick as, dating
41 myself a little bit, but when we had road atlases that were like
42 500 pages in the back of the passenger seat of the car, they're
43 like that but for the ocean environment, for the ocean neighborhood
44 we're looking in.

45

46 Hundreds of maps, hundreds of data layers that all can be brought
47 together to identify the most appropriate spaces. That's just phase
48 one. That's step one in identifying aquaculture opportunity areas

1 is using data to identify space. Phase two is a public conversation
2 about did we get it right? What are the impacts? We do that through
3 the NEPA process, the National Environmental Policy Act process,
4 which is a public conversation about making sure that we've found
5 the right places.

6
7 We started that effort in Southern California and in the Gulf Of
8 America. This year, on September 19th, we announced 13 aquaculture
9 opportunity areas, totaling more than 21,000 acres. Each of these
10 are between 500 and 2,000 acres. That's roughly enough space for
11 three to five commercial farms, each individual aquaculture
12 opportunity area.

13
14 Here's what it looks like in Southern California. Each of those
15 gray little boxes is an aquaculture opportunity area. And I should
16 say that these are not exclusive use zones. It doesn't mean that
17 other things can't happen there. These are just the places that we
18 think are most appropriate for aquaculture to grow. It also doesn't
19 mean aquaculture permit applicants have to go in them. They can
20 apply for a permit anywhere they want, but we have done a lot of
21 the analysis upfront for these locations.

22
23 And here's what it looks like in the Gulf of America. You can see
24 that all three of these locations are in the Western Gulf. They're
25 all off of Texas. We started coming out of the Atlas' with
26 locations across the entire Gulf. And when I say that it starts
27 that conversation, seven of those locations, no sorry, six of those
28 locations, there were nine, were eliminated through those
29 conversations of this might not be the best place, even though the
30 data and the atlases said it would be for various reasons. Those
31 six locations were removed.

32
33 So, we have three remaining and a little bit of icing on top of
34 the cake for these three we also did the baseline environmental
35 surveys. We did the baseline environmental surveys which is, you
36 have to see what's on the bottom to make sure that it's appropriate
37 for aquaculture to go there. We did those to unlock a new
38 methodology for baseline environmental surveys for everybody. We
39 did them, some ship based, and some using underwater autonomous
40 vehicles, which are much less expensive than having a research
41 ship go out and drag behind.

42
43 So, yes, we have them done for these places, but we've also
44 unlocked this cheaper, I should say, less expensive investment for
45 prospective farmers who want to farm in other locations. There's
46 now technology. We've shown that the technology can work for AUVs.

47
48 We are also working in Alaska. In Alaska, we are working in

1 partnership with the state. They invited us into their state
2 waters. We are only looking in state waters, and we're only looking
3 for shellfish and algae. Finfish is illegal in the state of Alaska.
4 Finfish aquaculture is illegal in the state of Alaska. So, we're
5 working in partnership with the state to find places that are
6 appropriate for shellfish and algae to grow.

7
8 We expect the Atlas, that's step one, to come out this winter.

9
10 Now, quickly, I'll walk through a couple of examples of the success
11 that we've seen in the United States and some of the building
12 blocks that I see that have already been built here.

13
14 First, this is one of a kind. The Natural Energy Laboratory of
15 Hawaii Authority, we call it NELHA, is a location where numerous
16 aquaculture companies all come together in one place. So, this is
17 a finfish farm called Blue Ocean Mariculture that's just off the
18 coast. They have their hatchery production and their processing
19 and all of that on the shore. And this is the suite of aquaculture
20 companies who are all in the same location.

21
22 Now there's a deep-water, intake that was built a very long time
23 ago for ocean thermal energy, and it is that deep-water intake
24 that has all of these companies come together. But what is really
25 incredible is that the community that these companies have built
26 together by being in the same location is something that I wish I
27 could replicate around the country. Where they're helping one
28 another solve problems, they're neighbors in the truest sense, and
29 some of them are competitors. Right? But in the sort of
30 precompetitive nature, in the-- there's just a lot of coordination
31 and communication that happens in this location. So, I wanted to
32 put it on your radar as this hub has spurred countless startups
33 and companies, and some of them have gone on to be quite big and
34 profitable.

35
36 And now a couple of building blocks that have happened here. So,
37 in 2023 there were two workshops that NCCOS held with BOEM. So,
38 the goal or the focus of the workshop was gathering data for wind
39 energy development but data on the ocean environment is data on
40 the ocean environment. I see these as building blocks and
41 information gathering for aquaculture as well.

42
43 This was starting a conversation. Those reports, and I have one
44 printed out copy of each if anybody wants to see them. I read them
45 on the way down. They identify the gaps. Here's where we don't
46 have data, but we think it's needed, as well as places where new
47 data could come from. So, to me, this is a steppingstone.

48

1 Also, some of you participated in 2024. We did a listening session
2 about our aquaculture program at NOAA. It was, "these are the
3 services we provide. What are the most important to you? If we
4 have an opportunity to grow, what should we do more of? Are there
5 new services?" This is what the Caribbean participants said that
6 the top services they would like to see provided is support for
7 economic development for aquaculture, identification of
8 aquaculture opportunity areas in the U.S. Caribbean, our regional
9 aquaculture coordinators who are incredible, and regulatory
10 efficiency and policy implementation.

11
12 New services, meaning that these are things that we don't have.
13 Socioeconomics for aquaculture, that's before I hired my one
14 economist. I was listening, but I only have one. That is part of
15 why we have that market analysis, seafood markets piece in sea
16 farm, is these listening sessions across the country highlighted
17 socioeconomics and market interactions. So, we put it into sea
18 farm. Partner and support for state and territorial governments
19 and expand regional aquaculture coordination.

20
21 These are regional aquaculture coordinators that we have today,
22 for this region. They sit in the Southeast Regional Office. So,
23 they are responsible for everything from North Carolina, South
24 Carolina, all the way through Texas and the U.S. Caribbean. They
25 have incredible depth of expertise. And we also have Jose Rivera
26 who, is based in Puerto Rico and works really closely with our
27 aquaculture coordinators and myself on issues of the U.S.
28 Caribbean.

29
30 I want to leave you with this. It's not only the executive branch.
31 It's not only this interagency conversation that's happening on
32 seafood because of this deficit. The Hill is having a conversation
33 too. Just this year, just since January 2025, there have been 50
34 bills introduced about aquaculture. *Fifty*. In the last congress,
35 there were, like, a 100-something. The conversation is happening.
36 Of course, it's not late breaking news. It's not the highlights
37 that you're seeing on CNN or whatever news network you're
38 following. But a conversation is happening on the hill about
39 aquaculture, and I just want you to be aware of it so that the
40 Council or individual fishing groups or whomever is aware and can
41 weigh in where most appropriate.

42
43 And with that, I'm really grateful for the opportunity to start
44 the conversation. I can't wait for the workshop so we can dive
45 more deeply into what aquaculture may look like and what people
46 are interested in, concerned about, and how to make sure that we
47 do it the right way. Because what we want is more seafood, not
48 displacement of existing seafood.

1
2 That's all.

3
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Danielle. Miguel?

5
6 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes. We want to apologize for this agenda, but
7 there was a time when we didn't know whether you will be able to
8 come and everything. This presentation is going to be part of the—
9 actually, that will be the first thing that will open the workshop.
10 We want to be able to tell the group of industry people, where the
11 United States is regarding aquaculture, and we also want to hear
12 from them to learn what they are doing.

13
14 Actually, we have a presentation by Dr. Cepeda where she will tell
15 us about a point that Ms. Blacklock mentioned, which is what do
16 you need in terms of permits to establish aquaculture here? We
17 miss the opportunity to have the aquaculture opportunity areas
18 because of the Bay Estuary constraint. Actually, I've been talking
19 with Mr. Richard from the Regional Office since the get go, and
20 he's on top of everything that we're doing here. I hope that he
21 can participate at the workshop either in person or virtual.

22
23 For the workshop, we have set aside some monies. I talked to Mr.
24 Piñeiro, and he said, once we have this, it's not a promised or
25 anything, but to the extent possible, he will then be able to
26 allocate some assistant for the workshop. The timing of the
27 workshop will be during the first half of 2026. If we do it before
28 the April meeting, we will be able to give you a preliminary report
29 of the outcome of the workshop.

30
31 So, Mr. Chairman, we can have the questions afterwards. We can
32 have the presentation by Ana Cepeda and then you will stay here
33 for the morning, and she will be able then to answer more
34 questions. Excuse me, Ana Salceda. I mixed the two of them. Ana
35 Salceda.

36
37 And when we come back, we will continue the discussion with Ms.
38 Blacklock, and it will be followed by Cepeda. This agenda had been
39 accidental at a point in time we were even talking about
40 eliminating this meeting because of the uncertainty caused by all
41 the furloughs. So, please bear with us because the Chair had to
42 allocate more time and less time for other things that we need to
43 do today. So, Ana?

44
45 **BIG FISH INITIATIVE-ANA SALCEDA**

46
47 **ANA E. SALCEDA:** Hello? Good morning. Thank you very much for the
48 opportunity to present this report of the second year of the Big

1 Fish Initiative. I'm going to share my screen.

2
3 As some of you know, the Big Fish Initiative, you're familiar with
4 it, but some other people in this meeting, I think they are not.
5 So, I put together a very visual presentation, so nobody feels out
6 of it.

7
8 The Big Fish Initiative. We are on our second year, finishing the
9 second year of a five-year trilingual campaign focus on sustainable
10 management of the species that aggregate to spawn and the
11 protection of fish spawning aggregations in the Wider Caribbean
12 and beyond. You see here the name of the main organizations behind
13 this initiative. This was born as part of the Regional Fish
14 Spawning Aggregations Working Group and management plan. Since
15 2025 has been endorsed by the IUCN specialist group for snappers
16 and 50 more partners in the Mesoamerican region and beyond, NGOs,
17 media, and government institutions.

18
19 Okay. Some of you know the campaign goals, they are very ambitious,
20 but it's for a five-year plan, and we have made some progress. The
21 first one is connecting the U.S. Caribbean with the region and the
22 global community of fishers, government, scientists, and other
23 stakeholders around the common message and solid knowledge on fish
24 spawning aggregations and the sustainable management of reef fish
25 species with an ecosystem approach. We seek to create awareness
26 and serve the Regional Fish Spawning Aggregation Management Plan
27 and other proposed national and international regulations to
28 protect the reproduction of commercial fish species by reaching
29 managers, decision makers, and stakeholders working to protect
30 FSAs.

31
32 Also, facilitate the on-the-ground and online knowledge exchange
33 of fish spawning aggregations, resilient fisheries among
34 communities, park managers, and scientists to advance locally
35 driven decision making and participation while promoting temporal
36 closures, MPAs, and other initiatives that protect FSAs.

37
38 Target audiences. The most important one being the fishing
39 community, but also decision makers and seafood consumers. Fisher
40 folk are an indispensable part of the solution. The first year, we
41 were very focused on artisanal and commercial fishers. During 2025,
42 I think we have done a better job at creating content and reaching
43 out to recreational fishers. But in any case, this group, their
44 knowledge, participation, and collaboration are key to the success
45 of the campaign and long-term conservation efforts and recovery
46 efforts. We are pleased to report that more than half of our
47 audiences is made up of the fishing community.

48

1 Decision makers, this is a big group that is that includes
2 fisheries managers, policy makers, and enforcement officials. Fish
3 consumers, of course. Fish consumers that drive demand and travel
4 to the Caribbean and import fish from the Caribbean. Not only that,
5 but they can support or encourage decision makers and influence
6 protection and legislation.

7
8 Key messages, since our initiative is focused on the reproduction
9 to recover these fisheries, obviously, we focus on the spawning
10 times. Right? We keep talking about the snapper grouper complex.
11 Right? So don't fish, sell, buy or eat groupers and snappers during
12 the spawning seasons. As part of the Regional Fish Spawning
13 Aggregations Management Plan, there are two flagged species,
14 nassau grouper and mutton snapper. So, these are the very specific
15 messages to protect the spawning of these two species. In fact,
16 the nassau grouper spawning season just began. So, we have been,
17 for a month, producing content and reaching out to fisheries
18 managers and enforcement officials to get ready to enforce the law
19 during the spawning time.

20
21 Campaign products. Thanks to the institutions and organizations
22 and businesses whose logos you see on the screen, we have been
23 able to produce a long-form film for broadcast, "Treasure of the
24 Caribbean." Thanks to SPAW-RAC, radio kits, two sets of them in
25 English and Spanish. This includes podcasts, PSAs, and we are
26 making them actually evergreen right now because we are repurposing
27 them to make video podcasts and reels. They are being really
28 effective as based on the response from the audience. We have
29 produced short films for the different target audiences with the
30 main calls to action.

31
32 We have the Big Fish HUB, as Miguel Rolón would say, is like an
33 enhanced website and is the neurological center of the campaign.
34 We will talk more about it. Social media platforms, we used to
35 have more of them. But during this second year, we have run the
36 campaign with no economic support. So, I've been doing it myself.
37 So, on the digital side of things, I run a slow, more than a slow,
38 a low maintenance campaign.

39
40 Posters and cooking books beautifully produced by the Caribbean
41 Fisheries Management Council. We have a very impactful Citizen
42 Science Program for fishers and enforcement officials. And as I
43 said, for the social media platforms, the newsletter is on hold
44 until we can get more funding.

45
46 The long-form film, "Treasure of the Caribbean," we produced with
47 PBS and some other partners. You see them at the bottom of the
48 screen. Two films. One, the original version in English and a

1 dubbed version in Spanish. This film includes all the principles
2 of the campaign. It's a message of hope, and we have been really
3 successful in film festivals. We were nominated in many places,
4 but we got the awards in the most prestigious of them. I'm
5 referring to film festivals that focus on science and nature and
6 conservation.

7
8 This film has been seen by more than 5,000,000 people in the U.S.,
9 Europe, and Asia on TV channels and platforms such as Apple TV and
10 Amazon Prime, and film festivals. But additionally, and I mentioned
11 the Citizen Science Program, we got funding from the Howard Hughes
12 Medical Institute to produce a specific outreach campaign for this
13 film. Remember, I mentioned the consistent approach to talk about
14 fish spawning aggregations and the species that we target.

15
16 So, this campaign, this outreach plan was focused on Belize,
17 Guatemala, and Honduras, but it expanded to the rest of the
18 Caribbean, and, in 2025, globally. So, you see some of you have
19 heard about what we did in 2024. Now you can see where we have
20 been in 2025.

21
22 Guatemala has been an incredible partner, and as I will say later,
23 great results from these events. Just in June, we had two screening
24 events in two different pavilions in Nice, France at the United
25 Nations Social Conference. Great, great event.

26
27 IUCN. We were in October in Abu Dhabi at the IUCN World
28 Conservation Conference. We had three events in three different
29 pavilions. That was an incredible event. We connected with so many
30 people interested in what we are doing, including Reverse the Red
31 and many people in Asia and the Arabic Peninsula that we are trying
32 to do the same with the same approach, putting the fisher folk at
33 the center of the solution and protecting fish responding
34 aggregations of these species.

35
36 And just two weeks ago, we supported the IUCN specialist group of
37 snappers for a two-day event focused on the Northern Brazilian
38 Shelf, specifically the red snappers, the southern red snapper,
39 and, of course, with the focus on FSAs, and we had a couple of
40 private screenings for decision makers as well.

41
42 For 2026, we are already funded the funds that we had from this
43 year, we have a little bit left. So, we are going to Panama. At
44 the end of February, early March, we are working with CRFM with
45 Marin, I don't know if it she's attending this meeting-- hi --to
46 go to a to be determined country, we don't know yet, and then with
47 the Corredor Biológico del Caribe to go to Cuba and Haiti.

48

1 The Big Fish HUB. Well, despite the lack of funding, we have kept
2 it up to date as much as we have been able to. Month over month,
3 have grown 9%. We have data of seventeen months, and we have 3,500
4 active users. If you haven't been to this site, I highly recommend
5 that you go because it's getting better and better. Based on the
6 data that I'm going to show you now, the resources that we have
7 there are useful and helpful to people. There are different
8 sections for the three target audiences and an amazing resource
9 library of where you can download free management plan, videos,
10 podcasts, PSAs, recipes, papers, scientific papers, books,
11 monitoring protocols, etcetera, etcetera.

12
13 We have two great things. We put together the data from all the
14 Wider Caribbean, and we have the regulations per species and
15 country in just one place. So, it's easy to see by checking this
16 chart. We also have what we call the Big Fish Protection Network.
17 We also collected all the information about fisheries departments
18 and enforcement offices, so decision makers can reach out to other
19 decision makers and their contact information is there, and they
20 can work with their neighbors or report IUU. Anybody can do that.
21 Here are some key features of the different sections. And some
22 analytics. Well, I'm missing the years.

23
24 Well, on the big map is the current from a week ago. This is the
25 data from a week ago. The little map on the right is the one from
26 last year exactly. You can see the difference, right, of how we
27 have expanded our reach.

28
29 Where are returning users located? Located Puerto Rico, the U.S.,
30 Spain, Mexico, France, you see the maps. The new users, if you
31 match our agenda of live events and our activity on social media
32 with this map, all makes sense. Right? So, the integral strategy
33 is working to drive traffic to the HUB. This is another way to say
34 it.

35
36 Something that hasn't changed much, in the last two years is the
37 languages that our users speak, mostly English, a lot of Spanish,
38 and you can see them. How do they find the HUB? How do they get
39 there? Well, if you see our campaign and the different things that
40 we do, all these make sense. It hasn't changed much, and that's
41 because of the continued promotion on social media where we usually
42 include QR codes, very specific materials or things that we want
43 people to see on the HUB, and that's why there's direct. And also,
44 of course, because in the life events and this Citizen Science
45 Program, we always promote the BigFishInitiative.com.

46
47 This piece of information makes us very happy because it proves
48 that the resource library is being used. Look, a year ago, a few

1 months after launching the HUB, we had 272 downloads, and now we
2 have almost 3,000 downloads, which means it's great. People are
3 using our materials.

4
5 Social media. Here we have one of our favorite collections. We
6 have many, because as we said, ecosystem approach, many species,
7 many countries, and many amazing partners in different
8 geographies. So, we have many different collections that we
9 constantly create content for. One of my favorites and fisher's
10 favorites, obviously, is Advice from the Sea. The fisher-to-fisher
11 advice. These are very short films featuring very wise people from
12 all over the country. In this case, you can see two people from
13 Puerto Rico and from the entire region and internationally. We
14 take advantage of our trips to keep producing content and
15 interviewing people. Right?

16
17 Well, look at Puerto Rico and the U.S. Puerto Rico's social media
18 community is one of the most vibrant and active that I have ever
19 seen. That has to do also with not only that we have featured many
20 people and subjects that Puerto Ricans and the U.S. are interested
21 in, of course, but also because the collaboration with the
22 Caribbean Fishery Management Council communication people has been
23 invaluable, and we usually post collaboratively. So, those are the
24 main countries, but we have people on our social media community
25 from all over the world. That has to do with our global events and
26 international events, especially in the last six months.

27
28 Well, we have grown. You can see the average for these are organic
29 campaigns. Organic campaigns and we have grown steadily, but not
30 really as much as the first year and, again, it's because it has
31 been a low intensity campaign this year. But the numbers are good
32 anyway. We have grown over the average.

33
34 We have obtained two important awards for the whole campaign, not
35 for the film, that's independent. This something awards are really
36 prestigious, and they are focused on impact campaign. We received
37 one that is the Media Impact Campaign for the strategy and
38 combination of media and outlets and one for Community Engagement,
39 which is great.

40
41 We talk about the campaign goals. What have we achieved? We have
42 received awards which has, you know, it's really good, it makes us
43 really happy, it recognizes our work, but as the president of the
44 Howard Hughes Medical Institute used to say, "more important is
45 the work that we do in the real life," right? So, one of the things
46 that we did was, on the film and the outreach campaign, worked
47 with the local partners in a very strategic way was the protection
48 of the Cayman Crown and its fish spawning aggregations in Guatemala

1 and Belize. Based on the partners from Honduras, it was helpful to
2 push the legislation in Honduras that protects some species of
3 groupers and FSAs.

4
5 Based on the numbers from our executive producers and our own
6 analytics, we have reached 6,000,000 people. And this is pretty
7 conservative. Right? Expanded audience and network; better
8 informed community, more knowledgeable stakeholders, more
9 awareness in everything that has to do with FSAs, reef fish and
10 connectivity. Connectivity is a very important subject for all.
11 Exposure to the Regional Management Plan that has been promoted
12 and including the, of course, fishing bans. Engage fisherfolk, our
13 Citizen Science Program has contributed to push fisher's
14 ecological knowledge and fisherfolk's key role in a species
15 recovery into the agenda in several countries.

16
17 And we have become catalyzers of efforts, subregional and regional.
18 The U.S. Caribbean is better connected to the rest of the wider
19 Caribbean and the rest of the world on all-things Big Fish, and
20 more and more people and organizations are supporting our work to
21 recover reef fish species and protect FSAs. So, we have a huge
22 network of partners. We have the credibility of our audience that
23 is a very loyal community. We have the basic tools. We have put
24 the bases and build the infrastructure to keep going, to keep
25 making a difference.

26
27 So, it would be a shame to abandon the effort at this point. We
28 just need some funding for 2026. We have submitted three proposals,
29 but we won't hear from our potential funders until late 2026, so
30 we don't have any funding right now to continue the campaign. Thank
31 you very much for the time.

32
33 If you have any questions, I would be more than glad to answer
34 them.

35 36 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

37
38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Carlos? Given the short time that we have, what
39 I wanted to do is to thank Ana for all your help through all these
40 years. She's a professional with a big brain and heart, and she
41 alone has been able to put together this Big Fish Campaign.

42
43 **ANA E. SALCEDA:** Well, not alone.

44
45 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** You're sitting in Spain. I wish I was there with
46 you. So, one question, Anna. I know we are all short on funding,
47 and we cannot participate as we used to in international events,
48 etcetera. But in order to keep one thing of the campaign that you

1 think, like the HUB, for example, which is very important, what
2 will it take, in terms of monies and personnel, to continue that
3 part of the Big Fish Campaign for the next five years, or let's
4 say four years?

5
6 **ANA E. SALCEDA:** For the next four years? Well, I would need to
7 run the numbers. For 2026 with \$30,000, we can keep the HUB
8 updated. We have an amazing developer. She already reduced her
9 rate for the sake of our mission. But, yeah, with \$30,000, we can
10 keep alive all the digital parts of the campaign. I'm referring to
11 social media that drives the traffic to the HUB and keeping the
12 HUB up to date. That would be in 2026, just that part. If you
13 multiply it by four, that gives us \$120,000 for the next four
14 years, right?

15
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you. Mr. Chairman, this question is-- well,
17 we have been trying to support the campaign. I believe this is the
18 most successful story that we have, ever, besides the management
19 plans to protect the spawning aggregations. A key component of the
20 campaign is that the fishers are involved since the beginning, the
21 U.S. Caribbean fishers and Caribbean countries fishers.

22
23 To me that's something that is the key to moving forward with the
24 protection of spawning aggregations of snappers, grouper and other
25 species that have this strategy for reproduction in the U.S.
26 Caribbean. So, I know that the time is short. I wanted to leave it
27 there just before the break.

28
29 Now, we will continue working with Ana from the distance. If we
30 are able to secure the money-- I'm going to pass the hat in several
31 places to see what happens. I believe that if we can secure some
32 funding for the campaign in 2026, that would allow us to continue
33 the work that you started with the group, Ana.

34
35 I have Dr. Martha Prada here, and Dr. Yvonne Sadovy. They were the
36 one who put together the Spawning Aggregation Fishery Management
37 Plan. A key component of that plan is outreach and education,
38 especially getting the fishers to come to us and discuss these
39 issues at the different levels in each one of the countries. This
40 sounds easy, but it's not. In many countries-- I remember I was in
41 one country, I won't mention it, and the Fisheries Office told me,
42 "You come here to tell us about meetings with fishers and all
43 that?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, that's it. The meeting is
44 over because I don't want fisher to tell me what to do." And he's
45 still there. So, that gives you an idea of how difficult it is for
46 many countries to advance the fishery management and to work with
47 the fishers the way they work.

48

1 So, thank you Ana. We will be in touch. Hopefully, with better
2 news in 2026. Thank you.
3
4 **ANA E. SALCEDA:** Thank you very much, everyone.
5
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. We're going to take a quick ten-minute
7 break, and we'll continue with the mariculture.
8
9 (Whereupon, a brief recess was taken.)
10
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. People, we are going to start. The Chairman
12 is waiting.
13
14 Okay. Mr. Chairman has some changes. Dr. Angeli has to leave
15 earlier. So, we are going to move the consideration of membership
16 to the advisory panels first thing after lunch at 01:30 after we
17 come back.
18
19 The other thing that we can use. Now, Dr. Cepeda is going to give
20 us a report on the status of the work that she's doing regarding
21 permits, and then we can gather and have a question and answer
22 with Ms. Blacklock and Cepeda. If we don't have time, then the
23 presentations by Cristina Olán and Jannette will be done at the
24 next meeting in April. They graciously agree.
25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, we're going with Dr. Evelyn Cepeda.
27 Fifteen minutes.
28
29 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** ¿Evelyn, estas ahí? Is she there?
30
31 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** ¿Evelyn, nos escuchas? Can you hear
32 us?
33
34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Evelyn, yo creo que estas en mute. A ella tiene
35 problemas compartiendo la pantalla.
36
37 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Evelyn, I already have here your
38 presentation, so I can move the slides while you are presenting.
39
40 **EVELYN CEPEDA-PÉREZ:** Okay.
41
42 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Evelyn, before you start. Dr. Cepeda agreed to
43 help us gather the information regarding the permits in the U.S.
44 Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico for anybody interested in a
45 mariculture project. Doctor Cepeda is retired, but she was a
46 scientist working with the Department of Agriculture in Puerto
47 Rico in charge of aquaculture projects. So, she has worked in
48 aquaculture science and management for many years.

1
2 Her presentation will be about the information that you need, the
3 agency that you need to contact. This is an update because her
4 work will finish next year. And this also will be presented at the
5 workshop. So, Evelyn, the floor is yours.
6

7 **PERMITS, CERTIFICATIONS & ENDORSEMENTS FOR MARICULTURE PROJECTS**
8 **PUERTO RICO & U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS**
9

10 **EVELYN CEPEDA-PÉREZ:** Okay. Let me see if I could move this. I'm
11 trying to expand the slides.
12

13 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We can see it. Are you projecting or is it here?
14

15 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** She's doing it.
16

17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. We can see it. Go ahead.
18

19 **EVELYN CEPEDA-PÉREZ:** Okay. I don't know if I could move it or
20 not. If Cristina could move the slides for me, I will appreciate
21 it.
22

23 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** I can move the slides for you. I have
24 them ready. I will share my screen, and you just have to see what
25 I'm sharing.
26

27 **EVELYN CEPEDA-PÉREZ:** Okay. Well, thank you.
28

29 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** You're very welcome.
30

31 **EVELYN CEPEDA-PÉREZ:** Good morning to everybody. Today, I will
32 present an overview of the permitting certifications and
33 regulatory requirements for the establishment of a mariculture
34 project in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. This
35 presentation will cover the main agencies involved, the key
36 environmental and operational regulations, and the step-by-step
37 from project concept to final approval. Next. Okay.
38

39 As Miguel mentioned before, this is only a part, like, a
40 preliminary overview of the information that I already gathered.
41 The main goal is to compile all regulatory procedures for
42 mariculture projects in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. I
43 divided it in different steps.
44

45 First, to evaluate all laws and regulations relating to mariculture
46 activities. Second, to interview federals and local government
47 officials in order to obtain information from them, in terms of
48 the application, if they have application forms, if it has to be

1 a certification, etcetera. Also, interview mariculture project
2 managers that are already operating, at least in Puerto Rico. After
3 I have that information, I will prepare a flow chart of all
4 mariculture permitting steps in order to facilitate all these
5 procedures to anybody that wants to develop a mariculture project
6 in this area. Okay.

7
8 Even though there is a lot of interest in developing aquaculture
9 in the Caribbean region, sometimes it's a little bit difficult
10 because of the permitting system. Sometimes the managers of these
11 projects really do not know where to go in order to obtain the
12 permits and have run-down information in terms of which agency
13 should go first and then which is the last one. Next, please.

14
15 Okay. Before any aquaculture project could go to the agencies,
16 they need to have, like, a plan, an operational plan in order to
17 have all the information necessary for the different agencies,
18 regulatory agencies, to obtain their permits. Okay?

19
20 These are the main steps that are necessary. First, the project
21 concept. Okay. What type of species will I culture? Is it native
22 or imported? If it's imported, there are going to be a lot of
23 restraints, and it's more difficult to obtain the permit. What
24 kind of production system? Do you want to have only a hatchery,
25 land-based, tanks, ponds, a seabed culture, offshore cages.

26
27
28 The project goal is very important. At what stage is the project
29 goal? Is this going to be a research project? Is it going to be a
30 pilot-scale project or a commercial project? Also, you have to do
31 a feasibility assessment in terms of the ecological aspect of this
32 activity. Next, please.

33
34 Okay. Next, this one is very important. Conduct site selection and
35 environmental assessment. Okay. In the area where you want to
36 develop your project, is it suitable in terms of water quality,
37 the depth, the currents, the possibility of hurricanes going
38 through that area, bottom type and temperature. If you have land-
39 based facilities, then, of course, you need a building and
40 electrical permits, local zoning information, septic/wastewater
41 connections. You also have to check the possible environmental
42 impacts to organisms that are already in the place, habitat
43 protected area. Something that is also very important is the
44 navigation. Are you going to be in an area that is highly
45 navigable?

46
47 Next, please. I will try to go as fast as I can because I know you
48 are short on time.

1
2 Another part that is very important is the community and how the
3 community will impact your project. Will it be positive, will it
4 be negative. Could you work together. For example, in Puerto Rico,
5 the two projects that are on a research level are working with the
6 fishermen. Those projects are in the Eastern Side of Puerto Rico.
7 The other users of the area are also very important. Those could
8 be other persons or other groups. For example, the fishers,
9 tourism, marinas, harbors, etcetera. Those areas, you have to try
10 to avoid them. Next.

11
12 Mariculture operation. This is what you're going to do and how you
13 are going to do it. Okay. You're going to bring brooders from
14 outside or use native organisms. Are you going to capture in the
15 wild or do you already have specific tanks from another facility?

16
17 Feeding is very important. The type of chemicals that you use in
18 your facilities because that could affect the environment. So, you
19 need to have a protocol to avoid those kinds of problems. The other
20 thing is the harvesting procedures. You see, the coastal area is
21 offshore. Does that type of harvesting procedures create conflict
22 with other users? Next, please.

23
24 The actual projects that are operating in Puerto Rico do not have
25 a grow-out phase. But in some cases, in a large cage mariculture
26 project, you will have a processing plant, mainly for fish and
27 crustaceans. How are you going to process this? At whole, frozen,
28 etcetera? You have to estimate the production volume and the
29 capacity, and what are you going to do with those disposals. That's
30 very important.

31
32 You need a specific place in order to do this processing
33 procedures. And, of course, you need permits to build specific use
34 for that goal. Next, please.

35
36 Normally, this has to do with activities that are going to be
37 performed offshore. If you design a cage, how is the cage? What
38 are you going to use? Long line, tanks. Mooring system, that is
39 very important. Water intake and outflow system, in this case, is
40 for land-based facilities. And the installation of the equipment
41 in order to do so. Next, please.

42
43 Before or prior to going to any regulatory agency, you need to
44 prepare environmental documentation. That is the information that
45 you need for you and also for the agencies. You may have to do an
46 environmental impact statement or maybe you have to do an
47 environmental impact assessment or statement. Okay? It depends not
48 only in the region, but also on the complexity of the project.

1
2 In some cases, for example, in those two that I mentioned here in
3 Puerto Rico, they didn't do this process. Okay? So, if you have
4 any problems or you create contamination, for example, biological
5 contamination, well, you need a mitigation and monitoring plans
6 for that.

7
8 Biosecurity is very important, specifically if you're going to
9 bring brooders from outside that are important outside Puerto Rico.
10 Outside Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands. Next, please.

11
12 Taking that into account, let's go to the permits system in Puerto
13 Rico. The permits, the endorsements and application. The major
14 agency that is in charge of the regulatory procedures is the
15 Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, DRNA in
16 Spanish. You have to take into account that now the Department of
17 Natural and Environmental Resources also have within another
18 agency that was called the Environmental Quality Board. So, now
19 it's an office within the Department of Natural Resources.

20
21 What are the permits that you need for this? Coastal use and marine
22 resource permits. Okay? You need authorization in order to use the
23 coastal areas and coastal waters. Also, if you're going to be
24 placing gears or other kind of structures.

25
26 Are you going to use submerge lands? This is very important. That's
27 one of the things that they evaluate. They have, the Department of
28 Natural Resources has an aquaculture permit through the office of
29 permits that is within this agency. If you are going to import
30 species, you will need the permit from this agency.

31
32 It's very important, and they evaluate these kinds of things,
33 endangered species, essential fish habitat consultation with the
34 federal government. This is done in order to know if the place
35 where you are going to develop your project may be affected or may
36 affect critical organisms, critical habitats, or that may displace
37 the organisms that are already in that specific area. This is done
38 also in order to comply with the National Marine Fisheries Services
39 the NMFS, and Fish and Wildlife Service. Next, please.

40
41 Also, because we don't have the environmental quality board and we
42 also don't have the solid waste agency, all the things that they
43 evaluate are now inside the Department of Natural Resources. Local
44 environment quality, they will evaluate that. Solid waste.
45 Captured permit application, if you are going to use local species
46 and you are going to capture in the wild. Water quality
47 certification. Also, they have to evaluate if your projects is
48 consistent with the coastal zone management of Puerto Rico and

1 also the federal state. Permits are valid, normally, for one year
2 and have to be renewed annually. Also, the Department of Natural
3 Resources asks for an insurance policy. Next, please.

4

5 Okay. There's another agency that is important. And that is the
6 department-- No. Backwards. Okay. Backward.

7

8 Can you hear me?

9

10 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Yes.

11

12 **EVELYN CEPEDA-PÉREZ:** Can you-- okay. Backwards. Wow. Okay. No.
13 Next one.

14

15 Okay. The Department of Agriculture, in conjunction with the
16 Department of Natural Resources, also evaluates and has to
17 authorize if you want to import any kind of aquatic species.
18 Sometimes they ask that they must have a veterinary certificate.
19 Next.

20

21 Okay. The planning board has a joint permit application with the
22 federal government in order to facilitate all this information
23 that I already told you, but it's mostly on the environmental
24 aspect. And also, the Department of Health, you need a permit from
25 them if you are going to be processing and selling the product in
26 Puerto Rico and outside.

27

28 Recently, they added another agency that I didn't put there. That
29 agency is called the Permits Management Office. This office, this
30 agency, what they mainly do is centralize permitting portal for
31 construction operation and endorsement, trying to speed up the
32 permits. But when I spoke with personnel from the Department of
33 Natural Resources, they told me that it depends. It depends on the
34 project, if the project is small, if the project is high scale.
35 But that's another agency that is in Puerto Rico. Next.

36

37 The U.S. Virgin Islands operates a similar system as Puerto Rico,
38 but they have different local agencies. The main agency that
39 oversees environment protection, coastal program, and aquaculture
40 development is the Department of Planning and Natural Resources.
41 Most of the things have to go through this department in
42 particular. For example, you have to register in order to have an
43 aquaculture or mariculture operation. Also, you have to have a
44 license to use the coastal waters of the U.S. Virgin Islands.

45

46 There's another permit for coastal outside, offshore or the marine
47 coastal area that has to be approved by this Department of Planning
48 and Natural Resources. Next.

1
2 Within the Department of Planning and Natural Resources, there's
3 a Division of Fish and Wildlife which they gave you permits related
4 to possession, the transport, and propagation of certain species,
5 native or imported species. They also have some restrictions in
6 protected or conservation area. Also, there are some local business
7 and building permits that are done through the municipal authority.
8 Next.

9
10 One important thing that the U.S. Virgin Islands has that Puerto
11 Rico doesn't have is that they developed a commission that is
12 called Aquaculture and Mariculture Division. They are the ones
13 that would establish an aquaculture and mariculture development
14 plan for Virgin Islands.

15
16 What is one step forward in this case is that they will evaluate
17 areas where aquaculture projects could be approved in those areas.
18 That thing, Puerto Rico doesn't have it. Next.

19
20 Okay. Federal government. The governments that could provide some
21 kind of permits or have to evaluate aquaculture projects,
22 aquaculture and mariculture projects is the federal government.
23 This applies not only to Puerto Rico, but also to the U.S. Virgin
24 Islands. In this case, for example, NOAA, Jose Rivera is in this
25 meeting today, gives guidance and consultation under the Magnuson-
26 Stevens Act and it is related to the marine habitat and fisheries
27 impact of essential fish habitat permits related to that. They
28 evaluate if the projects have all the information necessary to
29 protect those area.

30
31 Also, we have the U.S. Corps of Engineers. Mostly for offshore
32 activities they evaluate if you are going to use, in the coastal
33 area, if you're going to include some kind of mooring, pen,
34 etcetera, well, they have to evaluate them and decide if they give
35 you the permit or no. It's very important.

36
37 Recently, one of the projects that is working here in Puerto Rico
38 told me that the Corps of Engineers excluded them from their
39 permission because the kind of product that they're going to
40 produce is less than 100 pounds. So, they exited from that permit.

41
42 Also, the U.S. Coast Guard, they have to deal with safety of
43 navigation. If you have offshore cages, you have to do some kind
44 of electrical thing in order for the boats that are in the area
45 could see it and avoid collisions. Next.

46
47 The Environmental Protection Agency is very important because they
48 evaluate discharges from offshore operations which may require

1 under CWA, the Clean Water Act, and also the National Political
2 Discharge Elimination System. The Fish and Wildlife Service,
3 because they have to evaluate the possibility of interacting with
4 protected species or critical habitats. Next.

5
6 Also, the USDA APHIS, needs to be in contact for health
7 certificates for imported broodstock. If the imported broodstock
8 has to be quarantined, what are the plans? Restrictions, in some
9 cases, on non-native or invasive species. Also, Monitoring,
10 disease control, and traceability systems.

11
12 We have the Food and Drug Administration that if you are going to
13 do a processing plan, you are required to comply with the HACCP
14 program. Next.

15
16 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** That is the last one.

17
18 **EVELYN CEPEDA-PÉREZ:** Yep, that's the last one. Well, this is a
19 very brief review of all the procedures for different government
20 entities that have to deal with the permitting system for
21 mariculture projects in Puerto Rico.

22
23 In March or April, you will have another meeting. In that meeting,
24 I will give you more thorough information about these kinds of
25 agencies and recommendation on how to facilitate the process for
26 the development of mariculture projects in Puerto Rico and the
27 U.S. Virgin Islands.

28
29 I hope this small and very brief presentation clarified the steps
30 required for the agencies involving in development these projects.

31
32 Any question?

33
34 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

35
36 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Evelyn, Dr. Cepeda. Mr. Chairman, we
37 have until 12:00, so we can open now for questions and answer for
38 Ms. Blacklock and Dr. Cepeda.

39
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance?

41
42 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yeah, Evelyn, thanks a lot. You've
43 pretty much covered the laundry list. If I were a private investor,
44 it would scare the heck out of me. But you did cover everything,
45 almost everything.

46
47 One thing that I you may have to or may need to emphasize is the
48 getting a concession from the Department of Natural and

1 Environmental Resources for the utilization of the intertidal
2 zone, zona marítimo-terrestre, and the submerged lands of Puerto
3 Rico. And that's-- well, you will have to pay a yearly rent of
4 \$36.4 per meter square yearly. Okay? And every five years, DNR can
5 change their mind, and they can say "it's not going to be 36.4.
6 Now it's going to be \$100" or \$200 and that's without any
7 notification. That's a big cost.

8
9 I'm telling you because we had some issues with the submarine
10 cables, and the amount that my clients have to pay is enormous.
11 Something like, you know, half \$1,000,000 every year for a half an
12 inch cable. Anyhow, that's something that needs to be taken care
13 of.

14
15 And also, the first thing is the location, especially for the
16 submerged aspects of aquaculture. You need, first, to know, what
17 the designated use of class a and class b waters of Puerto Rico.
18 So, what is being proposed has to show that it will not, for
19 example, interfere with the propagation of natural communities,
20 etcetera. So, there's a class a, class b, and class c, which is
21 for industrial purposes, but class c is no longer being used.

22
23 The other thing is the certificate or the compatibility with the
24 coastal zone management programs. This applies both to the U.S.V.I.
25 and Puerto Rico. Without showing that your project is compatible
26 with the Coastal Zone Management Program is critical. Before you
27 get a compatibility permit, first, you have to have all the
28 previous permits. I mean, you have to show that none of the
29 environmental laws and regulations have been complied with.

30
31 It's very difficult. And the alternative, I mean, that I would
32 suggest for an aquaculture project in Puerto Rico should come from
33 a public policy. It needs to come from a high government level.
34 Because otherwise, I see so many obstacles in performing, in making
35 an aquaculture project economically feasible.

36
37 That's my major comment. But thank you, Evelyn. You did a good
38 job.

39
40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela?

41
42 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thank you, Vance, for that. Thank you,
43 Evelyn. So, in addition to that, the DNER in Puerto Rico usually
44 sends you to the U.S. Corps of Engineers, but the monetary part of
45 it goes to the DNER, and it starts at \$500 increasing to \$1,000plus
46 depending on what you're requesting the permit--

47
48 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** No, no. The \$500 is just for the

1 processing of the paperwork.

2
3 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Exactly.

4
5 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** So, just for submitting it, that's just
6 \$500 and that's fixed. But the rent is yearly.

7
8 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** In addition to that, it's not available
9 via the web. It has to be in person and in paper copies when you
10 submit all the paperwork. So, there are ways of being exempted
11 from the permits from the Corps of Engineers depending on what the
12 instruments are. You can be part of the national permit, but most
13 likely the beginning will cost you money to start with the
14 permitting part.

15
16 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yeah, Graciela, in order to face that
17 problem, some things are that can be done is a memorandum of
18 agreement between the government and the U.S. Army Corps of
19 Engineers and with other regulatory agencies. That can be done.
20 That, for me, that's the most practical way of performing or
21 installing a mariculture project in Puerto Rico.

22
23 **ROBERTO SABATER:** Another way to have it is to have the government
24 or find the location, get all the permits for the location, and
25 then put out RFPs to the people interested to then farm that area.
26 We'll have the government itself provide all the permits because
27 maybe, maybe, it will be faster. But then all they have to do is
28 find the area, prepare it, and then get all the permits, and then
29 put out RFP to have the private industry come in. Thank you.

30
31 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Let's follow-up to that one. That's precisely,
32 your two intervention, Vance and Roberto. That's what we want to
33 hear at the workshop. Also, Evelyn is going to contact the people
34 who already got the permit, who are already working.

35
36 When I used to work there, we had a memorandum standing with a
37 Corp of Engineers. It lasted for three years. It changed with the
38 administration. When you change governors, pfft, the
39 administration goes away. So, those two are elements that we want
40 to consider, from the presentation of Ms. Blacklock, but also at
41 on the national level, you have this type of activities already
42 considered. So, thank you very much.

43
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Nicole?

45
46 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Good day. Thank you so much for the presentation
47 and thank you for the illuminating comments on the process in
48 Puerto Rico. We've been working since 2021 on developing rules and

1 regulations and also a plan for aquaculture in the territory. I
2 just have a few comments on that.

3
4 First, a reminder that there will be different regulations required
5 in territorial and federal waters. We have been coordinating
6 closely with the federal government and the office of aquaculture
7 specifically. Andrew Richard sat in on our commission meetings
8 from 2024 through 2025, and we started a relationship in 2023 to
9 ensure that all of our rules and regulations will be federally
10 compliant and inclusive. Second, the part of this work has been,
11 commented on by members of these bodies, also by the public. We
12 had a public review comment period from November 29th, 2023, to
13 February 29th, 2024, and additional follow-up comments on our rules
14 and regulations and also our plan during that period. We are
15 currently waiting on the consistent process.

16
17 And so, that leads to my, specific comment to anyone who's
18 interested in starting an aquaculture and mariculture business in
19 the Virgin Islands. Please contact us directly because we're in a
20 rapidly changing regulatory environment, and I don't want folks to
21 get started on a pathway that's not going to be permissible either
22 because of programmatic issues like the species that you're using
23 or because of space issues, the citing, the coastal zone
24 consistency permits, or because of some of the inspection criteria,
25 there are ten inspection criteria that each aquaculture facility
26 will have to fill out. And so, there are a lot of details.

27
28 This is, as we've said, a very brief overview, and it's already a
29 lot of information. And so, folks are really going to have to have
30 done their research and have their business plans in place because
31 this is going to be very expensive.

32
33 And last, for an aquaculture workshop coming up, I have two
34 comments for that. First, I think it would be really nice for us
35 to be thinking about the federal waters when we're thinking about
36 the aquaculture workshop. And if we're going to expand our sense
37 of aquaculture regulatory environment and have this be most useful
38 to operators in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands that we
39 have separate sessions because we have separate regulatory and
40 business environments, and they're not going to be the same. So
41 the information for Puerto Rico is not going to be applicable to
42 the U.S. Virgin Islands and vice versa.

43
44 Thank you so much.

45
46 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you for that. Because that's exactly the
47 way that we are thinking. Actually, you're the star of the show
48 from the U.S. Virgin Islands Government for the workshop. I hope

1 that you can assist in person.

2
3 One question I have is at the deposition, both of us, at the
4 Economic Development and Agriculture Committee of the 36th
5 Legislature. One of the senators mentioned the possibility of
6 having a bill that will establish a policy for mariculture in the
7 U.S. Virgin Islands.

8
9 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Correct. So that bill that he proposed, we
10 actually did review and provide comments on. It was actually
11 redundant with the existing rules, regulations, and laws. And we
12 had invited his office to participate in all of our commission
13 meetings, and they had declined to participate. So, I think there
14 were a lot of layers of interest and also misinformation that were
15 provided at the specific hearing we were at

16
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Careful. We are recording.

18
19 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Because we've been very inclusive with exactly
20 who we've invited, which is the entire public. We've had our
21 notices out in the papers, social media, on the radio. We've done
22 interviews. We've brought it to different governing bodies. And
23 so, I'm very excited to move forward in a positive way with that
24 specific legislative office, but I think as you saw, the entire
25 body of the legislature was very well aware of that issue and was
26 supportive of-- because we did everything according to the existing
27 laws and those existing laws prescribed our timelines, personnel,
28 and what we needed to produce at the end.

29
30 So that was really an exciting process to go through because we
31 had done everything, worked so hard to do it really well.

32
33 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. Actually, I would like to take the
34 opportunity to congratulate you for your presence there. It was
35 interesting.

36
37 But Mr. Chairman, we're close to the top. But the outcome of this
38 workshop is not just to meet with people there. We would like to
39 have out of this workshop guidelines, specific guidelines with
40 context, with names and everything so that people can use it. Those
41 will be dynamic, and they will be included in a digital form and
42 a paper form at the meeting and after the workshop.

43
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance, you wanted to say something?

45
46 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yeah. Just really quickly. It is that
47 the U.S.V.I. has a very high advantage over Puerto Rico for one
48 reason. You have DPNR. You have the planning board and DNR at the

1 same agency.

2
3 Here we have the Puerto Rico Planning Board and the Department of
4 Natural Resources. Two different agencies, both extremely
5 complicated, but you guys have that junction which is so important
6 in the permit process. Thank you.

7
8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ms. Blacklock?

9
10 **DANIELLE BLACKLOCK:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Similar to the previous
11 comments about contacting the agency for U.S.V.I. permitting, I
12 highly recommend contacting our regional aquaculture coordinators
13 for any permit questions in federal waters. It is also a constantly
14 changing environment, and they will be the hand to hold you through
15 the permitting process. And I would also love to connect Evelyn
16 with our regional aquaculture coordinators, both Andrew Richard
17 and Kieley Hurff, so that they can coordinate on what the federal
18 landscape for permitting looks like.

19
20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Anybody on chat?

21
22 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** We have Vanessa Ramírez in the chat.
23 She wrote, "Things to bring the attention to is the example of
24 Mujeres de Isla with Nicolas Gomez and the Fisherman Village of
25 Culebra with their project of aquaculture for farming oysters could
26 bring a real perspective of reality and about the bureaucracy of
27 government in Puerto Rico."

28
29 **EVELYN CEPEDA-PÉREZ:** That's true. That's why one of the persons
30 that I contacted was Nicolas. I also interviewed Espinoza for the
31 queen conch project in Naguabo. I contacted both of them. I asked
32 them, precisely, that the process that is very difficult in order
33 to go through and both of them were just doing the research part.
34 But that's why we need all that information in order to try, at
35 the end of this investigation, let's put it that way, we could
36 recommend, for example, in Puerto Rico, to the Puerto Rican
37 government things that have to be done.

38
39 But Vance mentioned something that is very important. If you don't
40 have the specific legislation that really sponsors aquaculture,
41 you won't have anything and that's the problem. Well, no. Those
42 are the things that we have to eliminate and try to do an
43 aquaculture master plan for Puerto Rico.

44
45 To be honest with you, we are talking about the 20th century. By
46 the 1980's or something like that, there was an aquaculture master
47 plan for Puerto Rico, but it was only a draft, and nothing
48 happened.

1
2 Nothing happened.

3
4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, we wanted to just present this to
5 you, but the information that is going to be discussed at the
6 workshop will be the basics for many recommendations. Some of those
7 recommendations will not necessarily come from the Council. It
8 will come from local governments, federal government, and the
9 industry because the key is to get the industry engaged. One of
10 the only things that I think is good to be old is that in 1975, I
11 was the director of the Fisheries Development Program in Puerto
12 Rico, and we prepared an aquaculture development program, on paper
13 Vance. Did you see it?

14
15 Because we've been publishing on everything. We have the public
16 library, I mean, public printing office, and we have everything.
17 We have people. And it was very difficult. The point is that 1975
18 up to here, we're still talking about this. But this time we mean
19 it. This time we want to develop the mariculture project.

20
21 Something that Evelyn is going to do, and it was her idea, is to
22 contact everybody that has a project approved for aquaculture in
23 the U.S. Virgin Islands and/or Puerto Rico and look at their
24 experience. They will be invited to the workshop, and they will
25 have presentations discussing this. The other thing is that we're
26 going to invite the local governments. That's why Dr. Angeli's
27 idea is something that we had already considered. We are going to
28 divide it in, probably, one or two days, mostly two days. We'll
29 have one session that will be the U.S. Virgin Islands, and another
30 session will be Puerto Rico and the federal government, all
31 combined.

32
33 We will have an opportunity to hear from the industry people
34 represented, and some of them have come to the Council, you know,
35 the ones that are working with some snappers. Another component
36 that we are going to have is the international one. We are going
37 to invite Dr. Benetti and others because they have already started
38 a program under the FAO with mariculture for the entire Caribbean
39 Basin.

40
41 Unfortunately, the pilot project is in Jamaica. I don't know
42 whether they were affected by the hurricanes. I hope that they
43 were on the East Part of Jamaica. But there's a lot of people who
44 are looking at this opportunity. And as I said, this idea came
45 from Eugenio and I were discussing it, and he would like to move
46 this forward the best way possible.

47
48 I want to thank Danielle for being here; it made a difference. And

1 we will inform at the August, excuse me, April meeting, the status
2 of this development. If we can have the workshop before, then we'll
3 present to you the re the results of the workshop. But if we want
4 to do it right and well, we have to be careful and methodically in
5 the way that, you know, how are we going to identify people who
6 can come and contribute to the workshop.

7
8 Mr. Chairman, then we are going to, as I said before, because there
9 might be conflicts with the fisheries and this project and other
10 user groups, the three DAPs will be there representing the industry
11 of the fishing community, small scale and artisanal of the U.S.
12 Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. Thank you very much.

13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Daniel.

15
16 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Thank you, Evelyn, and thank you,
17 Danielle, for the excellent presentation. I just have a question.
18 Do you think it's a good idea to send a letter from the Council or
19 from NOAA Fisheries to the DNER Secretary mentioning the importance
20 of the new activities in aquaculture and mariculture. However,
21 Ricardo and me, we will report that, but maybe it's a good idea to
22 send that, if it is possible.

23
24 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We are going to send a letter of invitation to
25 the commissioner of the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Planning
26 and Natural Resources the Secretary of Puerto Rico explaining why
27 we are having this, and what is expected, that's it. Then they
28 should answer. Actually, the answered to the letter that had been
29 given to us by Angeli right now because they have been working a
30 lot with aquaculture projects, and I hope that we get the same
31 from the Secretary.

32
33 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Oh, thank you.

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Graciela.

36
37 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, Ms. Blacklock, I have a question
38 regarding the business chain associated to any project in
39 aquaculture. And that is, we have a big problem with invasive
40 species on the islands, and they could constitute a potential for
41 the diet that you need to feed the species that you will be bringing
42 up in aquaculture. Is that considered anywhere? We have iguanas,
43 lionfish, snakes, Vietnamese pot-bellied pigs. I mean, we do have
44 a number of these species including algae and seagrasses that are
45 invasive, and corals. So, they could provide the minerals and the
46 protein, etcetera, to make a diet. The University of Puerto Rico
47 at some point used to have the potential to develop diets for
48 animals, for mariculture and feed for cattle, etcetera. So, there

1 is a lot of potential there. Is that considered in these
2 opportunities for aquaculture?

3
4 **DANIELLE BLACKLOCK:** Thank you for the question. Feed is certainly
5 going to be a consideration for the U.S. Caribbean. Feed is the
6 most expensive component of any fed aquaculture after the initial
7 investment of infrastructure. It is the highest ongoing cost and
8 the need to import feed into the U.S. Caribbean could be limiting.
9 So, looking at existing sources that could be used for feed, I
10 think, will be definitely part of the conversation.

11
12 Have we talked about it yet? No, not necessarily. But that could
13 be part of some of the next steps of what are the things that we
14 need to research. We have a deep history in feeds research in
15 partnership with USDA of looking past forage fish. How do we get
16 out of that cycle? How do we find other feed ingredients that have
17 the right nutritional profile to feed fed aquaculture and have
18 healthy species? So, it certainly could be a part of that
19 conversation.

20
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Chat.

22
23 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** We have Vanessa Ramírez on the chat.
24 "Hi. I have a point of concern just for the record. From the point
25 of view of a commercial fishermen, knowing how hard it is to make
26 the permit process, and the expensive costs of these kinds of
27 projects, how are we, as local fishermen, being protected from big
28 companies that are interested in coming to the Caribbean and at
29 the end continue killing our sales and our wild catch as a small
30 scale artisanal fishery, just to think on this."

31
32 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Julian?

33
34 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record. And just to
35 piggyback on what Vanessa just said, that was the same concerns we
36 had yesterday when we had our conversation. And you know what I've
37 seen in the past when the University of the Virgin Islands did the
38 tilapia farms there were rules put in place that they could not
39 sell the product here in Saint Thomas. They had to ship it off
40 island.

41
42 You know, we are already going through enough hardships as
43 fishermen with an economy that bounces all over the place, with
44 the imports that are already coming in. You know, we're not against
45 aquaculture, but we are concerned that if the right rules are not
46 put in place, it can affect us directly if the product that is
47 produced is put directly into our economy. So, it's something that
48 when the rules and regs are being written, if that can be looked

1 at.

2
3 We're looking forward to working with the board and having some
4 more dialogue and discussions on the entire process. It's not an
5 easy process. I was telling Nelson here a few minutes ago after
6 looking at this presentation, it's like, "well, we need a couple
7 \$100,000 and another five years before we could get these permits."
8 In between that period of time, you have administrations that are
9 changing. People are changing. People come up with their own ideas.
10 So, you could be in the middle of a process and then, "Oh, no. No.
11 We're not doing it that way anymore." Well, you have to start over,
12 and your \$200,000 investment is gone. So, I'm just throwing that
13 out there.

14
15 Thank you.

16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, we're going to break for lunch. See
18 we'll see a 01:30 sharp.

19
20 (Whereupon, the meeting recessed for lunch on December 4, 2026.)

21
22 - - -

23
24 DECEMBER 4, 2026

25
26 THURSDAY AFTERNOON SESSION

27
28 - - -

29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, I think we're getting ready to start.
30 Okay. Welcome back from lunch. We have a comment from someone out
31 of Puerto Rico that wasn't able to make a statement earlier, so
32 we're going to let him go ahead and make a statement now.

33
34 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm
35 going to read the comment from Nicolas Gomez Andujar. He is the
36 president of the Fisherman Association in Culebra. Administrator,
37 I'm sorry.

38
39 He submitted a comment when we were about to have lunch regarding
40 the topic of aquaculture. He wrote, "Greetings, Nicolás Gómez here
41 co-pi from the applied research project for oyster mariculture in
42 Culebra, PR. We have identified a need for a more streamlined and
43 clearer permitting roadmap, especially federal regulations
44 regarding siting and gear deployed, including limitations for
45 entrepreneurs regarding benthic surveys and aids to navigation."

46
47 "Greetings." There is another question, another comment under his
48 comment. "Megan Considine, working with TNC's aquaculture team and

1 closely with Tania Metz TNC PR. We've created a permitting roadmap
2 for Puerto Rico in close collaboration with DNER and stakeholders."
3 "I'd love to share more about our report." Nicolas Gomez, "I also
4 want to express my concern with industrial-scale finfish
5 aquaculture development in Puerto Rico. Specifically, how without
6 appropriate safeguards threatens displacement local fishers &
7 workers"

8

9 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10

11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay, thank you. We're going to make a little
12 change on the schedule, on the agenda. We have Dr. Angeli who's
13 going to talk about the advisory body membership.

14

15 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Mr. Chair.

16

17 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Mr. Chair. There is a comment from Ricardo
18 López in the aquaculture topic.

19

20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.

21

22 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let's start with
23 the easy part. The group, yesterday, made a recommendation to the
24 Council that NGOs members rather than representing the entire U.S.
25 Caribbean will be considered on a regional basis. So, that's
26 something that Dr. Angeli suggested and that the group agreed on.
27 So, from now on, the NGO vacancy from Saint Croix will be replaced
28 by an NGO member working in San Croix. Then we move to Saint
29 Thomas/Saint John and do the same. And in the case of Puerto Rico,
30 we will also have a local NGO replacing any vacancy that we have.

31

32 So, if you all agree, at least for the record, please tell me, so
33 that I can include in the agenda.

34

35 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Do we need to make a motion? Or-- yes?

36

37 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** I think a motion would be appropriate,
38 especially so the record is clear on what you all are deciding.

39

40 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** I would like to make a *motion that the nonprofit*
41 *representative on the District Advisory Panels for Saint Croix,*
42 *Saint Thomas, and for Puerto Rico can be local independent*
43 *nonprofits, independent of the entire U.S. Caribbean.*

44

45 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** So moved Tony Blanchard.

46

47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Should we put this up on the screen?

48

1 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** If anyone needs it up on the screen, we can
2 type it out.
3
4 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, it was Angeli who made the motion seconded
5 by Tony Blanchard. The motion is to allow each District Advisory
6 Panel to choose a local non-profit representative to their
7 membership. All in favor say, "aye."
8
9 **GROUP:** Aye.
10
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Any nays? Any abstentions? No. Hearing
12 none, *motion carries*.
13
14 Okay. So, did Ricardo want to say something?
15
16 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Vanessa.
17
18 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No, todavía no han ter-- tiene que ser sobre
19 esta vaina.
20
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Okay.
22
23 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Okay. Sorry.
24
25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. For the record, let's finish the DAP
26 membership, and then we follow with everything else. Also, we want
27 to squeeze in, after the Advisory Bodies Membership, the OEAP
28 report and Cristina report. Those will be very quick.
29
30 In the case of Saint Croix, Mr. Chairman, Gerson Martínez decided
31 to continue for five more years as a member of the DAP. His son,
32 Gerson Martínez, he quit. So, we have one vacancy. We also have
33 Nicholas Charles Rogers and Daniel Santiago. They're willing and
34 able to participate as members of the SSC so-- excuse me, for the
35 DAP of Saint Croix. So, we need a motion to appoint Nicholas
36 Charles Rogers and Daniel Santiago. Mhmm.
37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I need the screen again.
39
40 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I thought it for this. I didn't need a screen.
41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Oh, you don't?
43
44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Oh, in the past we didn't use the screen. Is
45 that okay? Do we need to have it?
46
47 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** It's whatever you all prefer that would make it
48 easiest for everyone to understand what's going on.

1
2 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay.
3
4 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** So, if you would like the names on a screen, if
5 that would be helpful to you all, you can certainly do that.
6
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Okay.
8
9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you.
10
11 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Well, there.
12
13 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Mr. Chair, could you repeat the wording so
14 I can have it?
15
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Nicholas, con "h" entre la "c" y la "o." Charles
17 Roges and Mr. Daniel Santiago as members of the DAP Saint Croix .
18
19 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** I make a motion to appoint Nicholas Charles
20 Rogers and Mr. Daniel Santiago as members of the DAP of Saint
21 Croix.
22
23 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Second, Tony Blanchard.
24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, the motion reads to appoint Nicholas Charles
26 Rogers and Daniel Santiago as Saint Croix DAP members. All in favor
27 say, "aye."
28
29 **GROUP:** Aye.
30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none, motion
32 carries.
33
34 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The next?
35
36 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Mr. Chair?
37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes Heather?
39
40 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** May I ask a clarifying question?
41
42 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes. I'm sorry.
43
44 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** My understanding is that there is still a
45 remaining vacancy on the Saint Croix DAP. Is that correct?
46
47 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yep.
48

1 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes. They have two.
2
3 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Two remaining vacancies.
4
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The one that is Ex-officio that we just had the
6 motion, so they're looking for Ex-officio, and the other one is
7 vacant. Now is the time to-- Yep.
8
9 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay. So, I would like to move that-- I'm in the
10 process of locating a list of MREP graduates from the Saint Croix
11 MREP program and I would like to move that I could provide you the
12 list and that we select some MREP graduates from the list to fill
13 the remaining vacancies.
14
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.
16
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And also, to authorize the Chair to appoint that
18 person in between sessions of the Council.
19
20 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** And for Carlos to have the authority as the Chair
21 to make those appointments in consultation with others if--
22
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Gerson.
24
25 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Wait. Wait. Wait.
26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Wait. Hold on.
28
29 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Carlos, puedes escribir la moción.
30
31
32 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Heather, could you provide the wording,
33 please, for the motion?
34
35 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Repeat it so she can write it on the screen.
36 Dictate the motion to her. Yeah. No. But we need the motion first.
37
38 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay. Are you ready, Cristina? Sorry, Liajay.
39
40 I moved to appoint Antonio Ortiz, who is a recent MREP graduate,
41 to the remaining vacancy on the Saint Croix District Advisory
42 Panel. I guess it should say to fill the remaining vacancy. I'm
43 hearing that Antonio has expressed interest in serving. If for
44 some reason he declines, then we could move to the list, and Carlos
45 could work with the list to find someone.
46
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We need a second and then--
48

1 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay.
2
3 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Second.
4
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. So, Mr. Chairman and Heather, we have two
6 vacancies. Diana was telling me to make the correction because one
7 of them retired. Gerson Martínez Junior. So, there's one vacant
8 there. So, we can fill one with the MREP graduate and another one
9 with-- if a Gerson has somebody that you want to submit, this is
10 the time. But the first thing is that we allow the Chair to-- do
11 you want to include that in the motion also? To allow the Chair to
12 make that appointment once we have the name? That's Gerson's guy,
13 isn't it?
14
15 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Yes.
16
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay. So, do you want another graduate, or do
18 you just want to keep it?
19
20 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** It might be best to do two separate motions if
21 you're talking about adding authority for Carlos. If Antonio
22 declines the appointment, to then select someone else, I think it
23 would be best as two separate motions. That would be cleaner. Yes.
24 Vote on this one first, and then Heather can propose the second
25 motion.
26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, the motion is to appoint Antonio
28 Ortiz, who is a recent MREP graduate to fill the remaining vacancy
29 on the Saint Croix District Advisory Panel. Move moved by Heather
30 Blough, seconded by Vanessa Ramírez. All in favor say, "aye."
31
32 **GROUP:** Aye.
33
34 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions? Hearing none--
35 Discussion, Tony?
36
37 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** No, I abstain.
38
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. One abstention. Motion carries.
40
41 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Then the second motion? By Heather.
42
43 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** *Motion to appoint a recent MREP graduate to the*
44 *second remaining vacancy on the Saint Croix District Advisory*
45 *Panel. The Chair will have the authority to choose the graduate*
46 *from a list of names that NOAA Fisheries submits.* Is that okay?
47
48 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** Yeah. Maybe, like, a period after DAP.

1
2 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** There, she did.
3
4 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** Okay.
5
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, we need a second for that motion.
7
8 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Second.
9
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, the motion reads to appoint a recent MREP
11 graduate to the second remaining vacancy on the Saint Croix DAP.
12 The Chair will have the authority to choose a graduate from the
13 list of names that NOAA Fisheries submits. All in favor say, "aye."
14
15 **GROUP:** Aye.
16
17 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstentions?
18
19 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** One abstention.
20
21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. One abstention. *Motion carries.*
22
23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Shall I proceed, Mr. Chairman? Mr. Chairman, in
24 the case of the Advisory Panel for Saint Thomas/Saint John, we
25 have one open seat. I believe that Dr. Sennai Habtes was going to
26 provide some information regarding Calvin Junior.
27
28 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. I still don't have confirmation from him,
29 but as soon as-- I'll meet with them likely either this week or
30 next, and I can keep you posted if they agree.
31
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, I understand then that the Chair will have
33 the authority to appoint them. Once we get the information, he
34 will be able to appoint that person to Saint Thomas. Okay. Perfect.
35
36 And also, in the case of Saint Thomas/Saint John, we have an Ex-
37 Officio Member from an NGO that is vacant. So, anybody from Saint
38 Thomas can submit the name of that person, remember to contact
39 them and make sure that they are willing and able to attend at
40 least two meetings a year.
41
42 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Okay. A point of clarity?
43
44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes.
45
46 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** So, we would have that same vacancy for the
47 Saint Croix DAP. Would we want to make a motion for the Chairs to
48 be able to appoint a non-profit member or do we want to maybe make

1 a motion that we would have that become something that we bring to
2 the April meeting?
3
4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** It's up to you. What would you like to do? To
5 discuss it at the April meeting or-- the advantage--
6
7 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** I think we should discuss it at the April
8 meeting.
9
10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The advantage of having the Chair do it is that
11 we are going to have a meeting in the first half and before the
12 April meeting--
13
14 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Oh, before the April meeting?
15
16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** --of all the DAPs, in each area. So, it'll be up
17 to you how you would like to play it. The point is if you can wait
18 until April and that's your pleasure, then you can do that.
19
20 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sorry? Do--
21
22 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** I guess, are the DAP Chairs prepared to
23 coordinate and correspond with non-profits in between now and the
24 April meeting to appoint a member?
25
26 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** I think, yes. We need people that can have a
27 different vantage point of organization every year. Nice work.
28
29 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Okay. Yeah.
30
31 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** Gerson Martínez, for the record. I think, yes.
32 We need-- I think we can have an NGO. We like to hear the
33 perspective from each different sector and I don't mind working
34 with an NGO that can bring their side of the story or agenda that
35 maybe we can reach an agreement and work together with them. So,
36 I agree with that too. Thank you.
37
38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Dr. Angeli is asking whether the Chairs of the
39 DAP would be willing to contact that person?
40
41 **GERSON MARTÍNEZ:** An NGO? Well, I will have to get information of
42 participants because I don't have no contact with the Conservación
43 or any NGOs like how I used to have in the past. So, I think if
44 the Council or our local government give us that information, we
45 can work with selecting that person.
46
47 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Okay. And for the Saint Thomas DAP, is the--
48

1 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** So, Julian Magras, for the record. I'm at a loss
2 for words for this one. I would need, like, some ideas or
3 suggestions, because I wouldn't know who to choose right offhand
4 because I don't know who's running any of these agencies right
5 now. But, yes, most definitely because when we first started the
6 DAPs, we had an NGO sitting on it. We had a Coast Guard
7 representative. We had the Pew Foundation. So, yeah, we're open to
8 have that dialogue because once you close the loop from the
9 beginning, it makes the process going forward easier.

10
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** But the question is who's going to contact that
12 guy?
13

14 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** So, I think the-- so we are willing to help
15 provide contacts for the DAP Chairs, and I think maybe the decision
16 now would be if we're willing to make a motion to allow the DAP
17 Chairs or to allow the Chair to appoint them between now and the
18 meeting, or alternatively if we want that appointment to happen at
19 the next meeting. But if the DAP meeting is going to happen, then
20 I think we would make a motion to allow the Chair to appoint the
21 non-profit based on the recommendation of the DAP Chairs.
22

23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Well, my personal thing is NGOs are a little bit
24 difficult. It's not us. When you know a person, okay, you have a
25 fisherman you want him to go, that's it. I prefer, my personal
26 feeling is to discuss it at the April meeting, so you have better
27 information. These are NGOs that are interested in participating.
28

29 The reason we have these vacancies is because the Pew Foundation
30 no longer has any Caribbean project. So, certainly, Graciela and
31 I or whomever, I can go into Google now and find a bunch of NGOs.
32 And then, between the staff and the Division of Fish and Wildlife,
33 we can contact you and then at the April meeting we will be able
34 then to bring the appropriate information.
35

36 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** We're also willing to provide information on
37 the NGO partners that we work with. We work with over a dozen NGOs
38 each year. And so, we could provide some of those contact
39 information for those NGOs to the DAP Chairs and they could invite
40 them to the DAP meeting. To discuss and maybe make an appointment
41 later.
42

43 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Wait. Wait. The DAP Chairs don't invite anybody
44 to any meeting. It's the Chair of the Council.
45

46 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** Okay. The Chair of the Council could invite
47 them to the DAP meeting.
48

1 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, with that list, Carlos and I, we'll inform
2 all the three Chairs. These are the people that we're considering
3 for the meeting. And that way, Gerson, Nelson and Julian can say,
4 "Well, okay. We know these people. We don't know these others."
5 And then, we can have an open discussion at the April meeting, and
6 you select the one that is best for you, each one of the DAPs.

7
8 **NICOLE F. ANGELI:** I think that's best. I think this is an important
9 decision, and we want to reflect on it.

10
11 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay.

12
13 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Julian Magras, for the record. I really think that
14 the Council members at the closed meeting in April should choose
15 that person. I personally feel, from my group, I'm speaking for
16 Saint Thomas/Saint John that I shouldn't be the one to choose that
17 individual because they would not be biased. I think it's best
18 that in the closed session meeting that you guys choose that
19 individual out of whichever list is created. And we, the members
20 of the DAP, will have to work with that individual because that's
21 how it was done in the past.

22
23 Because if I choose an NGO that can benefit what we are doing, it
24 can become an issue. So, I'd rather the Council appoint someone
25 where the seven voting members choose that individual, I think it
26 would be the best outcome for the committees. At least that's my
27 opinion. So, thank you.

28
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Blanchard.

30
31 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Well, I am bored with Mr. Magras because,
32 really, this is our decision. This is not the DAP's decision. I
33 think we need to think this through, and information can be brought
34 to the table for the April meeting. So, we could overlook the
35 background, and decide what we want, who we want to put in that
36 position.

37
38 This really should be the responsibility of the Chair of the DAPs
39 or the DAPs members. So, I say we take charge, and we do the
40 deciding, and we see what names or what organizations are brought
41 to the table. We look at what they bring to the table, and then we
42 decide. Now, the DAPs can help with providing names. I'm not saying
43 that they can do that. But I think the decision as to who sits is
44 on us.

45
46 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** People, you are discussing something that is in
47 the policies and the regs that we have. The Council has the last
48 word for anything that you appoint. What we are saying here is

1 that it is a collaborative participation. For example, usually,
2 when I don't know the person, I ask the appropriate Chair, "Do you
3 know this guy or this person? Do you think he is a bonafide
4 commercial fishery, or recreational fisher?"

5
6 That's usually the procedure that we have. And then with the NGOs,
7 given that this is, as Dr. Angeli mentioned, is an important
8 meeting issue, then once we have the appropriate information, we
9 can share it with everybody. And then, at the meeting, in the open,
10 we discuss the pros and cons of this particular NGO, and then the
11 Council can take a final decision by vote.

12
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I want to make sure. On the screen, for the
14 motion, Mr. Ortiz is Anthony, not Antonio. I'm not sure if it was
15 Antonio they put up. His name is Anthony.

16
17 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, Mr. Chairman, the last one is-- Actually, we
18 have the OEAP, also. Okay. In the case of the OEAP, as the
19 representative from the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council,
20 remember the OEAP have one representative from The Gulf, one from
21 South Atlantic and of course the Caribbean. She retired.

22
23 So, we are instructing Diana to contact the South Atlantic Fishery
24 Management Council to see who will replace Kim Iverson. When we
25 get that, we will inform, at the next meeting, this is the person.

26
27 In Puerto Rico, we have two issues. One is Genius Fernández. We
28 think that he can be reappointed, but Daniel wants to hold it until
29 we find out whether he has his commercial license updated. Do you
30 have that information here today, or how do you want to proceed?

31
32 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Daniel Matos-Caraballo, for the record.
33 Very recently, we checked. It looks like this person doesn't have
34 the current or active commercial fishing license. So, if he will
35 represent a commercial fishing license, I think he must have the
36 license, right?

37
38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. The requirement for commercial fishing
39 license in the case of Puerto Rico, that's the agreement that we
40 have. They all have to be fully registered with a commercial
41 fishing license from Puerto Rico. The same with the U.S. Virgin
42 Islands.

43
44 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Okay. Well, in this case, maybe it's
45 better to stop this person unless he finishes--

46
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** But one thing we could do is the same as we did
48 for Saint Croix. The Chair, once we have the information from you,

1 and he has the commercial fishing license, he can be appointed for
2 the DAP Puerto Rico.

3

4 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** All right. Thank you.

5

6 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay.

7

8 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I need a little clarification on that, about
9 this commercial fishing license because we have stakeholders from
10 all sectors in our DAP. So, I'm not sure about what the commercial
11 fishing license requirement they're asking about.

12

13 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** In the case of Puerto Rico, if you don't have
14 commercial fishing license, you are not a commercial fisherman.

15

16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Right. Right.

17

18 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, if you are appointed as a commercial
19 fisherman to the DAP, what Daniel is saying, he has to have a
20 commercial fishing license. Nelson?

21

22 **NELSON CRESPO:** I totally agree with Daniel, because if we
23 renominated him, if he doesn't have his papers up to date, we are
24 going to be nominating a poacher.

25

26 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Exactly.

27

28 **NELSON CRESPO:** And we are not going to look good, you know, to
29 the people.

30

31 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Atta boy.

32

33 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** I'm glad that you said it. I didn't do it. I
34 didn't say it.

35

36 The other thing, Mr. Chairman, is a little bit-- I want Nelson to
37 address this one. It's the case of Roberto Silva. Nelson?

38

39 **NELSON CRESPO:** So, Roberto Silva, has been absent for a couple of
40 the DAP meetings. He never gave me a call or called anyone else
41 from the Council, you know, excusing himself on why he wouldn't
42 attend the meetings. So, I am recommending the Council to decide
43 what they want to do in this case. He's been absent, I think, more
44 than three times. So, I don't know. That depends on you, and what
45 you want to do.

46

47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, Mr. Chair, in this case, what we have is a
48 member of the DAP who's been absent two or three consecutive times

1 without any excuse. He's out of the DAP. You have to replace that
2 person with someone who is willing and able to participate. So, we
3 need to hear what you want to do.

4

5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Should he be contacted, or should we just go
6 ahead and replace him since he's passed the three-meeting
7 requirement? If you feel that he's not going to show up anymore,
8 then we go ahead and replace him.

9

10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** One thing that we could do is we're going to ask
11 Diana to contact him and see what the case is, and then we can
12 discuss it in the next meeting. So, we'll do it the nice way.

13

14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.

15

16 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Mr. Chairman, that's it for us. In the case of
17 the agenda, you wanted to have the opportunity to hear from the
18 OEAP and Cristina's presentation. Do you want to do that now?

19

20 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes. It will be the Outreach and Education
21 Advisory Panel. ¿Quién va primero, Jannette?

22

23 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Jannette.

24

25 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. She is going first, and she's
26 going to share her screen.

27

28 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Julian?

29

30 **JULIAN MAGRAS:** Yeah. Julian Magras, for the record one more time.
31 So, I just wanted to say that I am pleased to see that the Regional
32 Office stepped in and it's a great idea if we have vacancies to
33 try to get our MREP graduates involved. Presently, in the Saint
34 Thomas/Saint John committee, I have three MREP graduates on my
35 committee and I have a couple people that I need to also confirm
36 with if they're still willing to serve because I don't see that
37 productivity that is needed in such an important committee. And I
38 think it's a great way of using the MREP program and getting these
39 individuals, like we have told them in our closing remarks of MREP,
40 that you need to get on different committees, attend the meetings,
41 be involved in the process.

42

43 I think, Heather, you made a great step forward with bringing that
44 onto the record today. I think it's the right way for us to move.
45 It's something that, I think, each one of us as Chairs need to
46 look at any time we have a vacancy, try to get our graduates
47 involved from the different sectors. Because now that they have
48 had that training, they got something coming into the meeting that

1 they can use to better themselves and grow in that committee. So,
2 that's one comment.

3
4 My other comment has nothing to do with the meeting, but I have to
5 leave very shortly to go and deal with the film crew to get some
6 videos of fish and lobsters, etcetera, etcetera. And I would just
7 like to say happy holidays to everyone. Wish all of you safe travel
8 for those who are traveling you and your family. Have a safe
9 holiday season and looking forward to working with you guys in
10 2026. Thank you.

11
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Julian. The same to you and your
13 family.

14
15 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Outreach and Education.

16
17 **OEAP, SOCIAL MEDIA & LIAISONS OFFICERS REPORTS**

18
19 **OUTREACH AND EDUCATION ADVISORY PANEL JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA,**
20 **CHAIR**

21
22 **JANNETTE RAMOS-GARCÍA:** Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you
23 for the opportunity to present the report of the Outreach and
24 Education Advisory Panel. Today, I will provide an overview of our
25 recent work, our ongoing initiatives, and the materials we aim to
26 develop for the upcoming year. Following our most recent advisory
27 panel meeting, several needs and requests emerged that relate
28 directly to the development and reproduction of educational
29 materials. These needs are now being addressed and we hope to have
30 updated resources ready for distribution in 2026, depending on
31 available funding that may support the proposed activities.

32
33 One of the needed materials is the bilingual flyer. This flyer is
34 about the dolphin and wahoo. This is the dolphin/wahoo flyer
35 update. In this case, Cristina already made a series of social
36 media posts that have been released to increase awareness of the
37 flyer. Strength, community engagement, and highlight the
38 importance of marine conservation efforts related to dolphin and
39 wahoo species. So, the flyer is in the final stages of preparation
40 in both English and Spanish. This bilingual format ensures
41 accessibility and support clear understanding among the diverse
42 communities we serve. This is going to be for 2026.

43
44 Another thing. We are trying to make different kinds of materials.
45 One of them is the using the Genially platform integration and we
46 are using it for our poster. This platform is free, so we can make
47 interactive materials. I'm going to learn it. This Tuesday, someone
48 is going to teach me how to use this platform so we can make the

1 posters interactive. And we are going to integrate this in our
2 workflow.

3
4 This tool will allow us to create more interactive and visually
5 engaging learning materials that can be used in classrooms,
6 workshops, and outreach events across the region. This is how it
7 looks. I tried to do it myself, but I have to learn.

8
9 Both the U.S.V.I. liaison and the Puerto Rico representative
10 formally request the reproduction of the educational materials we
11 already have developed. Their intention is to distribute these
12 resources in their own outreach and educational activities. This
13 includes workshops, school programs, community events, and many
14 other initiatives where the content can strengthen local capacity
15 and support fishers' education across the region.

16
17 Another upcoming action is the calendar. Here we are representing
18 the Muñoz family of Puerto Real in Cabo Rojo. They represent three
19 generations of fishers and continues to be an important example of
20 heritage, identity, and continuity of our coastal communities.
21 This family is featured in the upcoming OEAP calendar. All
22 materials have already been developed, and we are aiming to
23 interview another family from Saint Thomas. So, we hope to have
24 this for 2027.

25
26 The new materials that also we are aiming to have, once it becomes
27 available, we are aiming to develop a set of stickers featuring
28 priority managed species. Each sticker will highlight a
29 conservation message, a memorable trade or superpower to support
30 learning and engagement. Some of the species are, from Puerto Rico,
31 the queen snappers, Saint Thomas and Saint John, queen trigger
32 fish, and Saint Croix, the parrotfish.

33
34
35 Also, new materials were proposed to create a clear and durable
36 signs that summarize essential fisheries regulations, including
37 closed seasons, size and bag limits, and protected species. These
38 signs will be installed in fishing ramps across the region to
39 support compliance and strengthen outreach to fishers,
40 recreational user, and coastal communities. If funds, of course,
41 are secured.

42
43 Other CFMC outreach effort. The Council has completed a new
44 educational book titled "Bajo la Luna," which is now fully
45 available through the CFMC social media platforms and online
46 channels. It's a beautiful book.

47
48 Also, we have been busy. There was an educational talk at CUNI

1 CAMP at Colegio Universitario de San Juan, "El Hábitat Esencial
2 Para Especies Marinas" on June 17th, 2025. CFMC staff provided an
3 educational talk as requested by the CUMI CAMP event in Colegio
4 Universitario de San Juan. The staff provided a presentation to 52
5 students from 15 to 17 years old about the marine habitats of
6 Puerto Rico, as well as related outreach material to the teachers.

7
8 Also, the Annual Shore Fishing for Kids at Club Náutico de Guayama,
9 which Liajay was in charge of. She was there on July 19th and was
10 contacted by 2025 MREP participant and Guayama's Nautical Club to
11 participate in the 18th Annual Shore Fishing for Children at
12 Pozuelo, Guayama.

13
14 Also, we had an educational talk on Lionfish Impacts. In October
15 2025, CFMC provided an educational session at the request of the
16 teachers of Segunda Unidad Mildred Arroyo Cardoza in Cabo Rojo,
17 Puerto Rico. Two student groups ages 11 to 16 participated in the
18 presentation, which focused on the biology of the invasive
19 lionfish, their ecological impacts, the importance of community
20 awareness. Educational materials were distributed to students and
21 teachers to support ongoing classroom activities. Thank you.
22 Questions?

23 24 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

25
26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

27
28 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Jannette? The Bajo la Luna book is going to be
29 translated into English so we can distribute in the U.S. Virgin
30 Islands. The beauty of the book is that it helps children get the
31 idea of how important it is to manage and conserve our species
32 around here. It has an amazing story. It is available in digital
33 format from our web page. So, in the first quarter of 2026, we are
34 going to do the translation. We already talked to the designer.
35 Diana is going to do the translation of all the pages once that is
36 available. Hopefully, before the next meeting, we will be able to
37 distribute it to the U.S. Virgin Islands and through the Division
38 of Fish and Wildlife and liaison officer, Nicole Greaux. Thank
39 you, Jannette.

40
41 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Daniel?

42
43 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Daniel Matos-Caraballo, for the record.
44 Thank you, Jannette. Excellent job. I'd just like to comment that
45 the picture with the three generations, I think Mr. Muñoz, the
46 older man in the picture, I'm sure he is the oldest active
47 commercial fisher in Puerto Rico.

48

1 He's, I think, 91, 92 years old, and he is still fishing at least
2 one or two times per week. He's a great person.

3
4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Guys, we need to continue with the agenda.

5
6 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We have Cristina.

7
8 **CFMC SOCIAL NETWORKS - CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ**

9
10 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Hi, good afternoon. As you know
11 already, my name is Cristina Olán, and I work as the social media
12 network coordinator for the Caribbean Council. I'm very thankful
13 for this opportunity. I know that we are out of time, so I will be
14 short.

15
16 As I already mentioned in other meetings, we have presence in
17 different platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, X, LinkedIn,
18 Threads, YouTube, Bluesky, and ISSUU for the documents.

19
20 I don't know what is happening. I moved them. I think that I have
21 internet. I'm so sorry. It is running, but I don't know what it--
22 something is happening there. Es esta computadora aquí. Okay. Here
23 we are now.

24
25 So, we have a QR code that goes to the Linktree. What I am showing
26 there is an image of what we have in our Linktree. We have all the
27 social media links, but also resources, the materials about the
28 descending device, meetings. For example, if you go there right
29 now, you can access the meeting materials there.

30
31 The content that we have been sharing is related to seasonal
32 closures, local and federal regulations, meetings and workshops,
33 outreach and educational activities, marine species, shared
34 content that we share from agencies and organizations whose mission
35 are similar to the Councils, collaborative content, follower's
36 requests, funding opportunities, bulletins, the Big Fish
37 Initiative, which you've already seen what it is about during the
38 morning half of this meeting, and the Salvapeje descending device,
39 Assist the Fish is the U.S.V.I. version. Also, the inbox and DMs
40 where people are always requesting or asking questions through the
41 inbox or direct messaging.

42
43 I want to share some examples of great collabs, shares, and
44 mentions that we have been having for the past few months. Big
45 Fish Initiative is definitely a successful collaboration. There
46 are two examples of very recent posts that we have been
47 collaborating with Big Fish Initiative and sharing the content.
48 One is about the nassau grouper, and the voice in that post was

1 recorded by Jannette Ramos-García, she's here with us, she is the
2 OEAP Chair. Also, the one about the lionfish. That one had multiple
3 collaborations such as Big Fish, CFMC, Puerto Rico Sea Grant, Chef
4 Giovanna Huyke, Burracas Films, and Haiti National Trust. So, in
5 that way, by collaborating with many other partners, we are
6 increasing the views and the opportunities for people to see that
7 content.

8
9 Other successful collabs, for example, the content that is
10 published by the Programa de Estadísticas de Pesca Recreativa
11 Marina, has been a continuous collaboration for many years now. We
12 share the content that they produce, but also Yamitza and Grisel,
13 they are always available to comment on the content that we publish
14 and also to provide me with information or suggestions when we are
15 developing content that is going to be seen by commercial and
16 recreational fishers. Also, we have the Pescadores Comerciales y
17 el Ambiente that for a long, long time they have been also sharing
18 the information that the Council produces.

19
20 Other successful mentions and shares are always done by La Fresca
21 Puerto Rico. They are from Arecibo and Crudo Fresh Local Seafood
22 from Cataño. Those are both fish markets. They are always sharing
23 the content, especially the ones related to the seasonal closures.
24 Those are examples of agencies, fishers, and fish markets that
25 share our post. La Fresca, Crudo Seafood, Puerto Rico Sea Grant,
26 Programa de Estadísticas de Pesca Recreativa Marina, Ritmico,
27 Chispa, Pescadores Comerciales y el Ambiente, Taller Ecológico de
28 Puerto Rico. I also want to mention la Asociación Pesquera de
29 Culebra, también.

30
31 As I always mentioned, those are only examples. There are a lot of
32 people and a lot of organizations that share the content, and we
33 are totally grateful for the continued support of all of the CFMC
34 followers.

35
36 WhatsApp. That is done by Wilson Santiago and Gerson Martínez, I'm
37 very thankful for that opportunity of collaborating with the
38 WhatsApp broadcast list that Wilson has been creating and adding
39 people for a long, long time now. And Gerson who manages the chats
40 in Saint Croix. Every time that we produce a post, they share the
41 information through WhatsApp. This has been very successful. It's
42 something that Wilson is going to explain in his presentation.

43
44 We also have an email contact list that Kiara Matías, a CFMC staff
45 member, keeps updated with the contact information that we provide
46 from workshops, activities, and social media followers. People
47 receive announcements through email.

48

1 CFMC Takes Actions/CFMC Toma Acción. It has been developed for the
2 IRA projects that Martha was presenting this morning. There are a
3 couple of editions that are already in the web page and also on
4 ISSUU. There is a QR code that directs you to the bulletins in
5 English and Spanish.

6
7 Workshop announcements. Those are some examples. Those were
8 produced for one of the IRA projects, Jannette has been working in
9 that project. When Martha was presenting and she was showing the
10 workshops that were done with the fishers and the teachers, those
11 are the announcements for the fisher workshops.

12
13 Marine Resource Education Program. That's awesome. Every time that
14 we have an MREP, we share content of things that are happening in
15 the workshop. So, people become more engaged with the Council
16 process but also with the MRET as an educational tool. Some of our
17 MREP friends are there. También nos están acompañando hoy. I was
18 able to attend the MREP National Steering Committee Meeting in
19 Portland, Maine last October. So, I'm very thankful for the
20 opportunity of being part of the steering committees in U.S.V.I.,
21 Puerto Rico, and also at the national level.

22
23 MREP is a great Outreach opportunity. From my experience also, the
24 opportunity of bringing together fishers, commercial and
25 recreational, managers, government, scientists it's a unique
26 occasion when people come together, share ideas and they can
27 understand what everybody is trying to do. It's something that
28 helps all the parts to come together and realize that we can
29 contribute with our ideas, with our work to the fisheries
30 management in the Caribbean. And of course, everywhere where MREP
31 is.

32
33 I have also been posting a lot about the Salvapeje workshops,
34 Assist the Fish is the name of the U.S.V.I. version. I provide
35 support on preparation of promos and presentations. I also assist
36 during the registration process. I take pictures and prepare posts
37 and stories for social media. There is an extensive use of the
38 newsletter about the descending device. And every time that we go
39 out, because we are getting all the contacts from the fisheries,
40 we are adding contacts to the CFMC master list, so now there is
41 more people that can receive information by email, too.

42
43 In Wilson's presentation and also Nicole's, there is a slide that
44 shows the QR code to de Linktree so that people can know where
45 they can find more information about the descending device and
46 also about the Council.

47
48 (Whereupon, Ms. Cristina Olán-Martínez played a video)

1
2 "WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER: Saludos. Te habla Wilson Santiago el
3 oficial de enlace en pesquerías para el Concejo de Administración
4 Pesquera del Caribe y el Departamento De Recursos Naturales Y
5 Ambientales. Te estamos invitando para el sábado seis de diciembre
6 a participar en el Festival de Pesca Recreativa de Agua Dulce Y
7 Agua Salada a darse en el Lago La Plata. Vamos a estar presentando
8 el dispositivo de descenso bajo una nueva reglamentación federal.
9 Vamos a estar en mesas informativas, como también van a dar
10 talleres de diferentes temas en cuestión a la pesca recreativa.
11 Los esperamos por allí el sábado seis de diciembre. No falten. Los
12 esperamos."

13
14 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** That is an example of one of the videos
15 that we put on social media to announce the festival. Ya ustedes
16 saben que Wilson va a estar allí. Wilson will be there with Nelson.

17
18 Also, we have been doing a lot of work with the general archive.
19 That is a new addition to the web page. If you go now to the web
20 page and to the QR code, it will take you to the general archive
21 and you will find four different areas. The CFMC regular meeting
22 documents, the Scientific and Statistical Committee meeting
23 documents, Outreach and Education Advisory Panel documents, and
24 also the EBFM TAP.

25
26 I have been working with the CFMC and also with the OEAP. If you
27 go to the other two sections, I have to do a lot of work now. But
28 for now, if you go to the page, you will have very simple access
29 to the documents that were shared in the meetings from 2020 to
30 2024. The new book that Jannette mentioned, it is available on
31 ISSUU. Also, we produced a CFMC QR code sign that will be used by
32 Wilson and Nicole when they put their educational tables.

33
34 Again, as I've mentioned in past meetings, I always have that slide
35 because together we make the difference. Thank you to all staff
36 members, panel members, committee members, fishers, liaison
37 officers, followers, scientists, managers, collaborators, friends,
38 among many other persons for all the support, information, and
39 ideas.

40
41 Thank you very much, and happy holidays.

42
43 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Miguel?

46
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah, Heather, do you have any suggestion for
48 the OEAP as we discussed before regarding the actions that the

1 Council has agreed on?
2
3 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** I mean, I'll start by thanking both Jannette and
4 Cristina for those great presentations. It's always so nice to see
5 what you're up to and we love to see the progress on the website.
6 It's looking really good.
7
8 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Gracias. Thanks.
9
10 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** In terms of suggestions, we did pass a motion
11 yesterday, right, to have them add as an agenda item to the next
12 meeting, just a discussion of maybe how we could look at or
13 repurpose new or existing materials and maybe identify some new
14 materials that we could use to help people at these meetings,
15 right, better understand some of the discussions that we're having
16 and the documents that we're reviewing. So, presumably, you guys
17 will have that conversation and then report back to us at the April
18 meeting, maybe?
19
20 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes.
21
22 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay.
23
24 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah. And thank you, Heather.
25
26 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you.
27
28 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** For the record, we are talking about the
29 glossaries when we come to meetings and also in layman terms, what
30 are the ways that the public, the fishers can engage in the
31 discussion at the Council meetings. We have all that information
32 here and there, but Jannette, Cristina and I will sit down and
33 prepare something for your consideration at the next meeting. Even
34 before that. We usually have two OEAP meetings a year. Now they
35 all have to be virtual. But in between today and next April, we
36 may have that meeting, so we can consider all that material and
37 bring the results to you during the meeting in April.
38
39 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Yeah. And I mean, I would encourage you to talk
40 with like Tony, right? and the DAPs. The people who might be able
41 to provide feedback on what's helpful, right, in terms of--
42
43 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Actually, there are members in the OEAP that are
44 fishers.
45
46 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Yeah, oh, awesome.
47
48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We got Ruth Gomez from Saint Thomas. We have

1 Gerson Martínez from Saint Croix.
2
3 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay.
4
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And also, we have Andy Maldonado from Puerto
6 Rico.
7
8 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Awesome.
9
10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yeah, they participate at every meeting that we
11 have.
12
13 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay.
14
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We'll make sure to follow what you just said.
16
17 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay. Thanks, Miguel.
18
19 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, I have a question. Cristina, do we
20 know when the information is reproduced by the other Facebook
21 people, like the guys in Arecibo, do we know how many times that
22 goes out?
23
24 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes, we know.
25
26 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** For the specific seasonal closure, for
27 the specific area closure, for that kind of--
28
29 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** We can know, and we can document that.
30 If we go to the post and we go to the statistics of each post, we
31 can know the amount of shares, the amount of likes, the amount of
32 comments. In the case of the videos, the amount of time that people
33 are watching the videos and also in the case of the documents, the
34 amount of minutes that the people are reading them.
35
36 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** But I mean, reproduced. Like, for
37 example, Pesca de Arecibo o Pescadores Comerciales, how many times--
38
39 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** How many shares?
40
41 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** --did they actually shared it.
42
43 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. Yes.
44
45 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Wow. Okay. And do they actually use all
46 the information that you send them, or do they recreate that
47 information and post it on their own?
48

1 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** There are some of them that just share
2 it. But in the case, for example, of Crudo Seafood they always
3 prepare a different post and then also use our information. They
4 also tag us and give us a mention. So, it depends on the people
5 and their strategies and what is better for them because if they
6 are also-- if they are influencers or they have a fish market or
7 a business, they also want a credit and to be seen. So, it's a
8 win-win situation. It's a win for them and a win for us.

9
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for Cristina or Jannette?

11
12 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, I have a question about the
13 enforcement agencies and the vigilantes, etcetera. Do we have a
14 specific way of communicating with them regarding the seasonal
15 closures, etcetera? But like, for example, how do we reach them in
16 terms of the social media or a WhatsApp group or something like
17 that?

18
19 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Good question. Because in the case of
20 the Big Fish Initiative, which is regional, not only in the
21 Caribbean Council, but they also already have posts that are
22 targeted to these outlets, to enforcement agents. In our case, we
23 are not targeting specifically the enforcement agents, but they
24 receive the information because they are also following us. We
25 both follow each other, like, I follow the agency and the agency
26 follows us, so they get that information that way. But if you're
27 talking about producing something for enforcement agency
28 specifically, that is something that we have to do.

29
30 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Sennai, and Wilson.

31
32 **SENNAI HABTES:** So, I want to commend you, Cristina, on the work
33 that you've done in updating the process that we go through for
34 outreach and education materials. I've seen a great increase in
35 the number and the ways that we target information to the
36 stakeholders in the U.S. Caribbean. What I would say, and this is
37 food for thought going forward, I think what would really be useful
38 is we have a number of seasonal and annual things that we need to
39 update the public on both territorially and federally and in all
40 three jurisdictions that we manage. It would be really useful if
41 the OEAP could develop a calendar that has links to the types of
42 materials that are available for each of those types of seasonal
43 closures or, you know, seasonal limits that we put in place, so
44 that each of the regions and each of the agencies just have it in
45 our fingertips. Right?

46
47 Either a hub or website or even just an Excel spreadsheet with
48 links to where we can find that kind of information. Right now, in

1 the U.S.V.I., we kind of manage a lot of that. You're connected,
2 obviously, with both Nicole and the people that do our social
3 media. So, every time you send us one, we forward it on. But I
4 think having it so that we can also print them out and put them up
5 on all the bulletin boards that CFMC has provided for the U.S.V.I.
6 Make sure it's distributed out through our local agents like bait
7 and tackle shops or the Game Fishing Club in Saint Thomas or Golden
8 Hook Fishing Club in Saint Croix, that would be really useful.
9 Right?

10
11 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Thank you.

12
13 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Wilson.

14
15 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** No, antes de que Wilson hable. Okay. One of the
16 reasons gave these reports to you is just to hear that. So, the
17 priority for 2026, for Jannette and Cristina, will be to have that
18 calendar. Not the other calendar, but this one is specifically
19 addressing what Sennai just mentioned. And then, that can be
20 distributed in the first quarter of 2026. And that would be our
21 first different tool modified for 2026.

22
23 And then, the second priority, well, parallel priority, will be
24 for the next meeting. We would like to have a tool, could be a
25 bulletin or whatever is most appropriate with a glossary of terms
26 that we use and also how you can engage. For that, we can revisit
27 the book that Dr. Vance Vicente mentioned yesterday, the Bolton
28 book about the basics of science and fishery management and those
29 two can also be included. We can present that at the next Council
30 meeting.

31
32 But the calendar could be done right now and distributed in the
33 first quarter of 2026. Of all the things that we will do, that's
34 probably the most important one. Let the people know what
35 regulations are in place, federal, local, Virgin Islands, Puerto
36 Rico. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

37
38 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Wilson?

39
40 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Wilson
41 Santiago, for the record. I just want to answer the question of
42 Graciela about the outreach for law enforcement regarding seasonal
43 closures or something.

44
45 In my WhatsApp broadcast list, I have, like, three or four rangers
46 from DNER. I also have, like, two from FURA the state police that
47 are marine police. So, they have the information. Also, the prensa
48 from the DNER, he is on the list too. So, he receives everything,

1 and everything is put in the DNER social medias, and they have it
2 firsthand.

3
4 For the rangers, they have a chat between them. One of the rangers
5 to whom I send the weekly publications is like the leader. He is
6 an educational leader of the rangers so, yes, they get that
7 information firsthand, when there's some closures or any
8 publication that we send them.

9
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I do know that in Saint Croix, we have
11 the online newspaper, V.I. Consortium, and I know that they put
12 out our closed seasons and advise the public. I don't know if it's
13 Sennai or enforcement that forwards it to the public information
14 officer for DPNR, but every time we have a closure, it's in that
15 newspaper.

16
17 So, next on the agenda we have the liaison officers report, Nicole
18 Greaux.

19

20 **ST. THOMAS/ST. JOHN USVI - NICOLE GREAUX**

21
22 **NICOLE GREAUX:** Good afternoon, everyone. I am Nicole Greaux, the
23 current liaison officer for the Saint Thomas/Saint John District
24 through Fish and Wildlife and the Caribbean Fishery Management
25 Council. I'm going to jump right into it. No long talking or fancy
26 pictures at the beginning of my slides today. Next slide please.

27
28 So, to touch off first on outreach and education plus engagement
29 for CFMC. We're going to do the descending device workshops. In
30 April, there were 10 to 12 people that attended the descending
31 device workshop. On June 6, which was our second workshop to be
32 held at the Game Fish Club, there was only two people. Apologies,
33 Graciela. Unfortunately, we had a miscommunication and the
34 confounded variable of excellent weather. So, we did not have a
35 lot of fishers that were able to attend that one.

36
37 The next workshop is to be collaborated with Mr. Julian Magras,
38 but unfortunately, he is not here right now to back that up. But
39 he did say that we were going to try to get something done through
40 the Saint Thomas Fishing Association and get our Descending Device
41 Workshop done that way.

42
43 Dolphin and Wahoo regulation materials, printed flyers being
44 handed out from both the Council and also that I pulled from the
45 NOAA pages. Thank you very much María for making those things
46 available to us. HMS permit applications. I want to thank Sarah
47 for attending our FAC meetings. We had some questions about HMS
48 permits. Why is the application so lengthy? And I've also assisted

1 fishers with guiding them how to get to the page and assisting
2 fishers with using my laptop at either registration or at the Fish
3 and Wildlife office to show them and guide them through how to
4 apply for an HMS permit.

5
6 In July, the OEAP meetings took place with Jannette. I think that
7 was our first one. We were speaking about the Fisher Information
8 and Education Program that we would like to have developed for the
9 United States Virgin Islands and also information material idea
10 building. And I'm very happy to hear that was strengthened by some
11 comments that were made today through our DAP members.

12
13 For the engagements, there have been about 18 liaison related
14 engagements that I have completed. Some of them that were the most
15 important were accountability actions. Serving as a liaison has
16 allowed me to engage with different departments at the request of
17 our fishers to do things that were very important to them. For
18 example, clear communication with the licensing and consumer
19 affair department just to make sure that our fishers were able to
20 renew their license due to something as simple as a change of
21 address and not having the fishermen be able to communicate. It's
22 the same place. There's just a change of address. I don't need to
23 pay an extra fee.

24
25 Also, being in contact with the Department of Agriculture to get
26 one of our fish markets in Market Square cleaned and power washed
27 due to an incident of sewage overflow that was impeding the sales
28 of fish. The Department of DPNR and Fish and Wildlife assisting
29 with getting a sink clogged out or drain clogged out in one of our
30 fish vending areas, the Paul Bryan fish vending area. So, these
31 are all things that were very important, but if I was not able to
32 do my liaison work and be in communication with these different
33 divisions, they would have not been completed in such an easy task.
34 Next page please.

35
36 Outreach and education for fish and wildlife. This is one of the
37 things that I really love. Being invited to community events for
38 Reef Responsible event tables, there has been an uptick in that
39 this year. Preregistration announcements, I assisted with that.
40 And also, getting a guest speaker to attend our preregistration.
41 The meetings, Mr. Manoj Shivilani for the lobster survey he was
42 able to attend in person and explain to the fishers why it was
43 important to partake in some of these surveys that are being
44 requested of our fishers.

45
46 Fish vending sites visits is always the best thing, helping fishers
47 meet compliance, assisting with scheduling port samples, and
48 reminding fishermen that we're at the end of the port sample term,

1 "Please, make sure that you get another sample done." Working with
2 other departments, as I've mentioned earlier, with regards to
3 fishing matters.

4
5 The best thing that we've done so far was being able to attend
6 registration week and meeting fishermen that were unfamiliar with
7 me as well as helpers and handing out the phish descending devices
8 and explaining their usage as well as showing them a couple of
9 them that are rigged. Next slide please.

10
11 Okay. The fun stuff. So, because of the relationship that I have
12 gained with some of our fishers, we were able to obtain fish at a
13 last minute from one of our local fishermen to have a next
14 generation of fishers through the Youth Ocean Explorers' Program
15 be able to dissect fish and also look for otoliths. This in turn
16 is going to help the up-and-coming generation of local marine
17 science by having hands on experiences and we would have not been
18 able to do this one particular class with the Fish and Wildlife
19 biologists if we did not have the fish. Next slide please.

20
21 The fun stuff. So, this is something that's really important, I
22 feel, with the Council and especially when it comes to outreach
23 and education. There are several other programs out there that
24 fishermen and also other liaisons can be involved in. Through the
25 Council, was able to be connected to some folks that were on the
26 Strong Coast and a survey committee through the Stanford
27 University.

28
29 I was able to attend two workshops in South America dealing with
30 mangrove and coral immersion and also the Strong Coast Nature Based
31 Solutions workshop that took place in Belize. That is something
32 that I feel we could touch on a lot here in the Virgin Islands
33 dealing with nature-based solutions. This is something that's
34 really important and a language that I feel would benefit the
35 fishers especially when it comes to things like development like
36 Mr. Blanchard was mentioning on our coastlines.

37
38 The pop-up workshop devices seem to work really well when I show
39 up at the table with a Reef Responsible table and I have the
40 descending devices. And also, just being able to be at the
41 different fishing tournaments with our Reef Responsible stuff and
42 educating not only fishers but also the up-and-coming fishers on
43 just being reef responsible. Next slide.

44
45 And thank you very much and I want to thank the Council for offering
46 me this opportunity to be a liaison to the Virgin Islands and Dr.
47 Angeli, our Chief of Fisheries, Dr. Sennai Habtes, and the Division
48 of Fish and Wildlife for letting me go out and engage with our

1 fishers.

2
3 This has been really great. This year has been very productive.
4 I've learned a lot, and I want to thank you all for allowing me
5 that opportunity. And I'm done. Thank you.

6
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Nicole. Wilson? Or are there any
8 questions for Nicole? Okay. Wilson?

9

10 **PUERTO RICO - WILSON SANTIAGO**

11

12 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Wilson
13 Santiago, for the record. This is my report as the Fisheries
14 Liaison for Puerto Rico.

15

16 The outreach and education participation this past month has been
17 very busy. We have been meeting We're waiting for the presentation.

18

19 Okay. So, again. Wilson Santiago, Puerto Rico Fisheries Liaison
20 Officer report. Next, Cristina.

21

22 Okay. So, for outreach and education, we have been meeting with
23 the recreational sectors stakeholders. We had a meeting with the
24 recreational sectors stakeholder to talk about the educational
25 program for recreational fisher. That meeting was held in the DNER
26 headquarters. We had a good participation of different
27 stakeholders, government, federal, recreational fishers, too. So,
28 it was a very productive meeting.

29

30 We are baking, that program is in the oven right now, again. We
31 are starting the PEPER program again. Helena Antoun, the leader,
32 made the presentation. I mean, she's making things happen. So
33 probably 2026, we are going to restart with PEPER Program, the
34 Educational Program for Recreational Fishers.

35

36 We have been participating in the DAP meetings. As always, I'm
37 always in contact with the DAP Chair of Puerto Rico, Nelson Crespo.
38 We have partnered for the descending device workshops. I think I
39 am going to mention it, but, like, 16 workshops we have presented
40 this year. In the next slides, I'm going to give you the exact
41 numbers.

42

43 My participation as a liaison in the MREP Steering Committee
44 meeting. In the workshop, I want to say thank you to Jeanne,
45 Courtney, Natalie, Leah, Rylee. Yeah. We're always hand to hand
46 working together-- Lauren, too. We're always working hand-in-hand
47 together. So, tomorrow, we're going to have our joint steering
48 committee meeting with the U.S.V.I. So, let's see what happens on

1 the next meeting.

2
3 We have also had a meeting with the U.S.V.I. liaison, and Cristina
4 Olán, to plan future educational publication for fishers. There
5 have been some issues regarding fishers from Puerto Rico and
6 U.S.V.I., too. So, we are planning some new publications that are
7 going to address those issues for the fishers of the Caribbean.
8 Okay?

9
10 We will continue sending educational and meeting publications via
11 the WhatsApp broadcast list. The WhatsApp broadcast list every
12 time we made a meeting or a workshop, it continues growing up.
13 Right now, we have like 1,100 fishers that I have in, like, five
14 or six broadcast list in my WhatsApp. So, it is not only fishers,
15 like I mentioned in my answer to Graciela's question. I'm also
16 addressing law enforcement, marine law enforcement, rangers, state
17 law enforcement. So, the information is-- they are receiving the
18 information. Every time we ask, we get very good feedback about
19 the publications that we make.

20
21 Like always, thank you, Cristina Olán. Like always, she's the angle
22 that is behind 98% of the publications in the broadcast lists.
23 Okay? Also, we share with DNER, Sea Grant every single publication
24 as well. Okay? So, this year, I had the CFMC educational table at
25 the Aquafest Festival. That was a festival made by, I think, NOAA
26 Fisheries personnel in Bahia de Jobos in Aguirre, Salinas.

27
28 Marine Debris Program. Marine Debris Program, yes. She invited us.
29 So, we went there without many materials compare to what we have,
30 like, I'm going to show you in this picture. See, liaisons, the
31 OAEP presentation mentioned already that the liaisons are asking
32 for materials. Yes. We need them. I know there is an issue with
33 funding. But, right now, the picture that Cristina Olán showed you
34 about the QR codes, that is new and that is very helpful because
35 with so little materials, now we have those QR codes that we send
36 them to ISSUU and the Linktree where all the publications are. So,
37 we continue to give the information, the educational information
38 to participant, fishers, and fishing communities. So, next.

39
40 Okay. About the descending device workshop. The Salvapeje, as we
41 call it in Puerto Rico. The fishers in Puerto Rico call it
42 Salvapeje. We have made, since the last August meeting, we've made
43 seven workshops.

44
45 Before the regulation was approved, commercial fishers were the
46 ones that were and are very interested. But since the regulation
47 was approved on November 1st, the recreational sector has been more
48 interested in taking the workshop. So, the next workshops that I

1 coordinated are going to be, well, we have one in Culebra in a
2 commercial fishing village, but we have, like, four Nautical Clubs
3 workshop.

4
5 So, the recreational sector is very, very interested in this
6 workshop after the regulation was approved. So, like I put over
7 here, you see all the participants, recreational and commercial,
8 the numbers. And if you see after-- Okay. The regulation was set
9 on November 1st that was in the Nautical Club of Boquerón, Cabo
10 Rojo. There were 32 recreational fishers and 23 commercial fishers.
11 That shows you what I just said that the recreational fishers are
12 more interested right now, and we are attending to the commercial
13 sector. You know? So, we continue giving the workshops. Next slide.

14
15 Here are some photos. The two at the top are, like, 98% of those
16 are commercial fishers, but the one photo at the bottom was the
17 one we took at the Nautical Club in Boquerón. Like, almost all of
18 them was like, 60% of them was recreational. Next one, Cristina.

19
20 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** I want to add something, Wilson. Since
21 we have also been receiving recreational fishers at the workshops,
22 we have families too. As you see in the first picture, we have a
23 family of four persons there. So, now kids are also attending
24 because they go with their families.

25
26 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Yes. Thank you, Cristina, for bringing
27 that up, because we made, like, a certificate for those kids for
28 attending the workshop. Because it helped them. It is something
29 for school. Right? For the apartment education, since they are
30 homeschooling.

31
32 Okay. So, the next descending divide workshop, like I mentioned,
33 is going to be next week, this next Saturday. We're going to be,
34 Nelson and me, we're going to be-- like I said, Nelson Crespo, the
35 DAP Chair, he's always in all the workshops with me. I give the
36 presentation, and Nelson has a table with homemade descending
37 devices that he made in his house. He has converted a lot of
38 things, and the fishers always are very interested. Nelson, if you
39 want to say something regarding this.

40
41 **NELSON CRESPO:** Yeah. Thank you, Wilson. See, it's so gratifying
42 when the participants, you know, saw the homemade descending
43 devices and they start making questions. It is even more gratifying
44 when they know who we are, they have started, you know, bringing
45 their concern. Most of the concern are related to the local
46 government, so I let Wilson, you know, bring the concern to the
47 DNER.

48

1 Also, the tackle shops have started getting interested, you know,
2 on bringing the descending devices workshops to their stores. We
3 always give the opportunity to all the participants, you know, to
4 bring all the concerns before and after the workshops. So, when
5 the workshop adjourns, we stay for maybe half hour to one hour
6 extra, whatever time they need, and we talk with them, you know,
7 to address all the concern and try to direct and resolve all their
8 issue.

9
10 It's so gratifying, and I'm very pleased, you know, to have this
11 opportunity.

12
13 I also want to say thank you to Wilson, to the Council, you know,
14 for the opportunity and also Cristina because she saw where the--
15 well, how Wilson says, she is the angel behind all this. You know?
16 She's always there to give us a hand. Thank you.

17
18 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Thank you, Nelson. So, like Nelson said,
19 also, he reminded me of something, in this workshop, the descending
20 devices workshops, we don't only talk about the descending device
21 regulation. We also include Council process. We present for the
22 participants all the panels of the Council. We talk about the MREP
23 educational program. So, we don't only talk-- we take the
24 opportunity to talk to them about other management stuff.

25
26 So, the next descending device workshop. We have four of them
27 coordinated already. One that, well, like Nelson said, the tackle
28 shop, Matos Marin Fishing Shop in Fajardo is going to be
29 determined. It may be in January or February. Okay. So, next slide.
30 Okay.

31
32 So other stuff. Puerto Rico Fishers' Interest, and Concerns. Like,
33 Nelson said, we always have time with them. My phone number is
34 private, but in the publications, I always print my phone number,
35 so they are always calling. They started day calling me all. I
36 receive more than 10 calls every day for helping fishers and
37 listening to them regarding state or federal regulation,
38 licensing, state license.

39
40 So, like I said, there is interest in the participation of the
41 workshops, and more interested in the DAP, OAEP, SSC, and the
42 Council process. So, like I said, we explain all that in our
43 workshops.

44
45 The charter licensing process, too. They have been very interested
46 on that, and they have been calling me and Nelson, too. Right now,
47 it's in process. We are in the process of creating an educational
48 workshop for the charters and head boats fishers in the island.

1 Like I said, state commercial fishing license process. I assist
2 with that weekly, maybe daily. Federal water regulations, I address
3 those at the workshops. And the sell fish in U.S.V.I., that is one
4 of the publications that my counterparts, Nicole and Cristina, are
5 working on to address some concerns and misinformation for all the
6 fish in the Caribbean, American Caribbean, so that they have the
7 information that they need, firsthand, from us.

8
9 So, that will be all for me. Let me see if there's another slide.

10
11 Okay. My next steps, continue with the descending device workshops.
12 We are focusing now around, like I said, the recreational sector,
13 but the commercial sector also participates in those workshops. We
14 will restart the educational commercial workshop, the PEPCO
15 program. This year, we have had, like, one or two of these
16 educational programs. We are adding more topics to that. We are in
17 reconstruction stage of the program. So, in 2026, we are going to
18 continue it.

19
20 Also, we are waiting for education educational materials to become
21 available to continue with the Council's educational table and
22 informing the fishing communities with marine educational topics.
23 So, that will be all for me. If there are any question or comment?

24
25 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Question for Wilson. Okay. Hearing None, Thank
26 you, Wilson.

27
28 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Yeah. Thank you all, and happy holidays
29 to all.

30
31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay, we're going to take a ten minute break?

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

34
35 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Cristina, puedo. Okay. We're going to get
36 started again.

37
38 Okay. So, next on the agenda is a letter sent to NOAA on the
39 Executive Order 14276. Restore America's Seafood Competitiveness.
40 I think that's going to be handled by Graciela.

41
42 **LETTER SENT TO NOAA ON E.O. 14276 RESTORING AMERICA'S SEAFOOD**
43 **COMPETITIVENESS**

44
45 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** But Miguel said that he was going to
46 read it for the record. So, the letter was sent on September 23rd.
47 You want me to read the letter for the record? So, the information
48 is available. The letter is responding the request to that we had

1 to fill out a template that they provided for the Councils to
2 respond to the Executive Order 14276.

3
4 So, we submitted the letter on time at the time that they had
5 requested. The letter was accompanied by the Excel table that they
6 provide. So, you have received this copy with the information.

7
8 The importance of this is that, number one, they requested that we
9 rank the priorities; that we tell them what the action was that we
10 were thinking about using for complying with the executive order;
11 the relevant citation of the actual regulation; the updated
12 description recommended action; the rationale for submitting the
13 information that we were providing; what was the proposed plan and
14 schedule for the implementation; and who was the agency responsible
15 for dealing with any of these recommendations.

16
17 So, you have a copy of that. We will go not in a lot of detail,
18 but we'll present the PowerPoint with some of the points that we
19 made for the table. Can I have the next one?

20
21 So out of the press, there was an extension to the request for
22 comments. So, it's open until December 15th. So, can I have the
23 PDF, please? And we'll be putting this on social media so anyone
24 who has not responded as of today will have until December 15th to
25 respond.

26
27 The way that this table was put together was we looked at the
28 information that the Council has been dealing with, the actions
29 and amendments that have been provided in updates to you throughout
30 the last year. The SSC and EBFM TAP recommendations of research
31 and information that is needed for sustainable management of the
32 fisheries. We look at the strategic--

33
34 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Graciela, I'm sorry. I have to
35 apologize. There are issues with the internet connection at the
36 hotel, that's why we are not seeing the document there right now.

37
38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Graciela, I don't think that we need the
39 presentation. Just go ahead and tell us what you did.

40
41 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, we looked at, as I said, what the
42 Council had been doing in tandem with the Regional Office and the
43 Science Center, the SEDARs that we had been working on, the SSC
44 and EBFM TAP research recommendations, the strategic plan that the
45 Council has in place, and from all that information, we put all
46 that in the table.

47
48 So, we had an Ad Hoc Committee meeting that looked at the species

1 that people wanted to remove from conservation and management, for
2 example. And that is something that the Council had begun, the
3 matrix that Sara presented to you. So, that's part of what we
4 requested that we had to look at before we start deregulating
5 things.

6
7 There has to be a rationale for doing that. So, we needed to put
8 that explanation. We also included here the request not only from
9 the ad hoc but from the DAPs that are on the Council minutes,
10 etcetera. For example, evaluate the MPAs that we have had in place
11 since the 1990s. Are they working or they are not working? If they
12 are not working, should we open them up? So in response to that,
13 the Council had submitted a coral reef conservation program grant
14 for 2025 to include the fishers in the whole process of selecting
15 the sites that we needed to review, where the aggregations were in
16 one of these MPAs, how the scientists do the work that they do for
17 acoustic, for bathymetry, for the currents, etcetera, and have
18 them be part and be equal partners, in pay and in say, in the
19 development of the work that needed to be carried out.

20
21 So, beginning tomorrow, I think we have the first fisher on board.
22 There has to be a commitment because they have to be part of the
23 whole process, the same thing that the scientists are. So, that's
24 the first year that we're going to do that. It begins in Tourmaline
25 in Puerto Rico on the West Coast, which is the one that people are
26 complaining that it's not working. It could be due to changes in
27 habitat, etcetera. So, we have ROVs, divers, acoustics, all the
28 technology that's available to monitor, one of the MPAs and the
29 spawning aggregation are going to be in place.

30
31 So, one of the requests is deregulating Tourmaline if it's not
32 working, but it's also stating that this should be a program that
33 should continue to be every year to go and assess all these MPAs
34 with the fishers in full collaboration with the scientists.

35
36 So, the same way that they requested that, we also provided
37 information on we need recreational data. So, MRIP needs to restart
38 in Puerto Rico and needs to be implemented in the Virgin Islands.
39 Again, if you're going to deregulate the recreational fisheries,
40 no more bag limits or whatever you can think of, you have to have
41 the information. Are they having an impact on the general
42 population of the fish that we're trying to conserve and manage?

43
44 The compatibility of regulations, the duplicity of these
45 regulations, it's also considered here because it's something that
46 the Council was already working on. So that would also help in
47 terms of if there are regulations that are duplicating the same
48 thing that we already have in place, let's take one off, but you

1 need to assess if it's really two separate regulation or if they're
2 doing the same thing, and that's part of the rationale that we
3 provided for the table.

4
5 One of the other issues that we had is the real need for social
6 and economic data for any of the work that the Council is doing.
7 So, a priority in this request was to actually get that information
8 and make it available for us to be considering the changes that
9 need to be done. There is some information on both the spiny
10 lobster, the issues that the Council is currently working on with
11 the Regional Office. The information that SEDAR 103 would need,
12 it's also included in that comparison that we made, do we need,
13 what do we need, what do we have, and what can we do away with.
14 So, SEDAR 103, is the alternative approaches to the U.S. Caribbean
15 data, it's also part of what we consider.

16
17 We also looked into enforcement. So, this is not directly related-
18 it's not something that the Council can do, but we do have
19 regulations on the import of lobsters into Puerto Rico and the
20 Virgin Islands. So, we need to monitor that. We need to make sure
21 that the lobster that is coming to the island meets those
22 requirements. And it's something that definitely impacts the
23 commercial and recreational fishers, especially the commercials.
24 Because if you're getting very small lobsters at a lower price,
25 then the local lobster will, you know, the price will go down.

26
27 So, all of these things that I've mentioned have a direct impact
28 on the economy of the local fishers. Because if the Council is
29 going to move forward with doing away with things, we have to make
30 sure that not deregulating what we have will really result in a
31 benefit for the local fisheries.

32
33 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** The other important thing is this. The important
34 thing, Mr. Chairman, and the rest of the group is that we need now
35 to wait until December 15th. And after that Washington is going to
36 respond to each Council regarding the letter that we send with the
37 information that we sent. As we have said before, many of the
38 things that we have here, we have been working with them and we'll
39 work parallel to this activity. So, the Council work will not stop.
40 It's just that it could be modified once we receive the feedback
41 from Washington.

42
43 This letter addressed all the questions that were sent by Mr.
44 Piñeiro to each one of the eight Councils. At the meeting of the
45 CCC, we were all on the same page saying that this is not something
46 that is going to happen overnight. We know that we have to follow
47 a procedure, but we have to wait until we have the feedback from
48 them in order to move with the specific things that they want to

1 address regarding 14276.

2
3 Remember, 14276 is a follow-up of the 13-whatever the name is. So,
4 14276 reinforces that. Remember, the Council sent, at that time,
5 we sent a letter with the things that we could do. So, the Executive
6 Directors will meet on December 11th. One of the things that we are
7 going to discuss is ways that we are going to implement whatever
8 they send us from Washington.

9
10 We also agree that our work continues. And there is a pilot survey
11 project, not a survey, but a pilot project in The Pacific. Because
12 the idea is that if you deregulate certain fisheries and by the
13 way, remember that we discussed, and it was a presentation by Andy
14 Strelcheck, the idea of a 10 to one. You know, if you want to have
15 a new regulation, you have to deregulate 10 of them. That only
16 applies for any fishery that's \$100,000,000 or above. But that
17 level can be lower by OMB. But at this time, Dr. Andy Strelcheck
18 told us that in our case, we don't have to worry about it.

19
20 But the pilot study in the Pacific is looking at the effects of
21 any of these regulations, these regulations in terms of the monies
22 that you spend managing it. The preliminary result, we don't move
23 that far. It's almost the same cost. But the other part that could
24 be negative is that you deregulate some of the species that later
25 on you will need to regulate because the fishery will lose it.
26 They will lose the economic return to investment.

27
28 So, at the next meeting of the CCC in spring, we expect to have a
29 reaction from the National Marine Fisheries Service to all the
30 letters received from each Council. But again, we cannot reiterate
31 this or emphasize more. The word of the Council will continue, as
32 we have discussed at the previous day, the famous metric and
33 everything.

34
35 The other thing that we discussed with Washington is every action
36 that you take has to be in accordance with the MSA. Meaning, let's
37 say that you want to drop any particular species from the
38 management plan, you have to follow the procedure of amending that
39 plan. And then, you have to provide a rationale for the secretary
40 to approve or disapprove your action. So, we told that to the ad
41 hoc committee.

42
43 We said the same thing in August, and we want to reiterate that in
44 part because I have received questions from different people at
45 the office. One of them was interested because he was thinking
46 that if we do this, we have to force the local governments to do
47 the same thing. And I said, "no way, Jose." This is all federal,
48 the regulations that are approved by the Department of Commerce

1 Secretary for the EEZ. However, if the local governments cannot
2 prove that no action by them or whatever they do is not detrimental
3 to the fishery, the authority or the secretary can go with the
4 shoreline. And that happened. In the case of the Marlins and
5 everything, since the get go, they go all the way there.

6
7 So, my answer to this person and he works with one of the
8 legislators here. They wanted to know, and they also wanted to
9 know whether there was a project a long time ago that will
10 establish by law that Puerto Rico will adopt any management measure
11 approved by the Secretary of Commerce through the FMP process. And
12 that was turned down because of the change in administration. But
13 he wanted to know what the status was. Actually, he had a lot of
14 information about 14276. He was well prepared with all this.

15
16 So anyway, my point is that 2026 will be interesting, and they
17 will expect a lot of action from the eight Councils regarding this
18 and the local government, as well. How this is tied to how they
19 can do this thing? Well, the monies that they will authorize for
20 activities in 2026 all the way to 2027 will be tied to this 14276.
21 That includes mariculture, fisheries, the commercial and
22 recreational.

23
24 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, a couple of other things. Most of
25 what you saw in María's presentation on the actions, amendments,
26 etcetera, had already been considered here because, as I said,
27 these are things that the Council was working on. The issue of the
28 carryover of the ACLs, is also included here because it's something
29 that could benefit the fishers increasing the amount that they
30 have available for the next year, etcetera.

31
32 There is other work that needs to be done, for example, in terms
33 of queen conch. So, there is reference to protected resources, to
34 other agencies that might have something to say or might have
35 already included in their work plan projects to look at the
36 population assessment of queen conch in the area, for example. So
37 that's also part of the table that we submitted.

38
39 The consideration of the matrix, which is the number one issue,
40 because the ad hoc already had spoken on behalf of what species
41 need to be removed and why. Then the whole setup that we have will
42 give us that information, do these species really need to be
43 removed from the FMPs? And if they are, then that would be what
44 the Council will move forward.

45
46 In some cases, some of the information that's requested will need
47 additional funding that the Council doesn't have. So, it speaks to
48 information that we need from the Science Center. It speaks to

1 essential fish habitat, for example, for some of these MPAs. It
2 speaks the evaluation of management strategies that we have in
3 place. That doesn't mean that everything is going to happen because
4 it's really dependent on funding.

5
6 So, we lost the person who was expert on MSE, on a management
7 strategy evaluation from the Science Center. So there goes staff
8 person who could do the work, but now it would have to be contracted
9 out to someone else. So, everything in that sense, it's included
10 in this table.

11
12 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Graciela, can you expand on the Tourmaline
13 survey. Who's going to be paying that? And also, the coral reef
14 funding that we receive, I understand that 2026 will be the last
15 year. So, we have to find other source of funding if we want to
16 continue monitoring those areas. Can you expand on that?

17
18 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** So, the Coral Reef Conservation Program
19 had provided funds for the Council to, more than anything else, to
20 look at the areas in the EEZ. So, this is 30 meters and beyond.
21 So, it requires for a period of time specialized diving, ROVs,
22 etcetera. So, we requested to have the last year of the CRCP that
23 comes to the Council to develop a real cooperative research program
24 to look at the MPAs, the marine protected areas, or the areas in
25 the EEZ. Because in most cases, after the diving depth that we
26 have, then the ROVs need to come in place.

27
28 The remotely operated vehicles need to come in place because there
29 is no diving beyond a certain depth. So, this is the last year
30 that we have it. The plan is that there will be fishers also from
31 the Virgin Islands coming to be part of the-- there is monies in
32 that proposal to have them come and be part of the work that is
33 being done. The assessment takes place over the full moon. So,
34 there is no aggregation right now at the Tourmaline in the West
35 Coast, but the instruments are going in the water tomorrow.

36
37 So, there is a fisher from the West Coast who's already
38 participating in that, to go and deploy the equipment, see what
39 the scientists do. As I said, they're getting paid the same as the
40 scientists get paid when they go out in the field, which is I think
41 the first time that is done that way. The idea would be to set it
42 up in such a way that this can be done every year. That way,
43 fishers will be participating as equal partners with the scientists
44 in deciding where to do the work, when to do it, because the moons
45 are not the same for all the fish when they aggregate, etcetera.

46
47 They would be part of the data collection effort, not diving, but
48 looking at the ROV because there is a pilot for the ROV, but you

1 have to be looking at what you're seeing because you don't want
2 the instrument to go hitting corals and stuff like that. So, it
3 needs to come up and down. They will be part of listening to what
4 the acoustic is telling us about not only fish because we'll be
5 reporting also on the sound of vessels when they come into the
6 protected area and stop. And we're assuming that they'll be fishing
7 and then take off again or when they're in transit. So, you can
8 hear all of that in the recordings.

9
10 They'll be helping with the analysis of the data, because sometimes
11 we get information that we don't know exactly what it means. So,
12 someone who knows the area, someone who knows the fishery would be
13 able to help in the analysis and the conclusion that you can reach
14 from the information that you're looking at. And then there'll be
15 part of the discussion in terms of writing up the report and
16 everything else.

17
18 So, it's not that we're asking them where the place is, where
19 should we go to drop the ROV, where should we go drop the divers,
20 is that you have to be there throughout the process. So, it's three
21 to four days every month that you have to be part of this team.
22 So, it's a commitment. So, there is more meetings coming up for
23 the different groups of fishers that we need to hire.

24
25 But as I said, this is the last year that we have this kind of
26 funding available. We are hoping that if the current Reef
27 Conservation Program continues, even if it's competitive, we
28 should have enough from this first year to make sure that we can
29 compete for that money in the future. So, we can repeat it in every
30 single one of the MPAs that we have in place. Because there is no,
31 except for here and there, there is no more monitoring that is
32 taking place.

33
34 So, we'll see how that works. Because as I said, it starts
35 tomorrow.

36
37 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

38
39 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any question for, Graciela?

40
41 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** No questions, but there are comments
42 in the chat. But she is first.

43
44 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Heather?

45
46 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Heather Blough here. So,
47 thank you, Graciela, for that. Miguel has mentioned that there's
48 interest in continuing the work of the Council, right, in the

1 interim while we're waiting for the second public comment period
2 to end in further direction from headquarters on next steps.

3
4 I guess my question is we have heard great interest from the
5 fishermen over the last several meetings about the deregulatory
6 agenda and some items they're interested in pursuing to get some
7 relief. And the list that you just reviewed with us, Graciela,
8 there's a lot of items that will require additional funding, but
9 there are also several that we could just tackle right now. Two of
10 the ones that we've heard repeatedly are reviewing the regulations
11 for effectiveness and redundancy, and the other one was working
12 with the territories to foster regulatory consistency. And you
13 sent us the strategic plan yesterday after Sennai had brought up
14 his request to crosswalk.

15
16 Both of those are in the strategic plan. They've also been
17 highlighted at the last few meetings. And I guess I'm wondering if
18 there would be interest in maybe pursuing those two things while
19 we're waiting for further direction on the other. And if so, if
20 that's something that maybe Council staff could, between now and
21 next meeting, like, help us put some bookends around.

22
23 You know, like, what exactly do those mean? We know we have, I
24 guess, a preliminary list from U.S.V.I. on the duplicative
25 regulations, what they've done so far and what they might like the
26 Council to do on the federal side. I don't know if we could do the
27 same with Puerto Rico.

28
29 And then with the effectiveness activity. The things that you've
30 already mentioned, are closed areas being reviewed. I don't know
31 what the timeline is but are there other rules too currently in
32 place that we could be taking a second look at to see are they
33 performing the intended objective, and might we want to consider
34 eliminating those.

35
36 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Some of the things that the Council had
37 tabled regarding, for example, the red hind spawning season and
38 the seasonal closures and the MPAs are also included here. So,
39 again, I mean there is some work that can be done on that. I think
40 that we tabled it because we didn't have quite enough data to move
41 it in one direction or another.

42
43 Hopefully, the fourth year of the MPAs that includes Lang Bank and
44 the three of the West Coast of Puerto Rico, no, two of the West
45 Coast, provide information for the Council to move along those
46 lines. But the final report won't be ready until the mid-next year.
47 And then we'll have a very good look at that.

48

1 So, those are things that we can keep on. The compatibility issues,
2 we should be working on that.

3
4 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Maybe for compatibility, we could have, like, a
5 presentation at the next meeting about the current, the list, like,
6 what we've done. And I think we did hear from one of the DAP Chairs
7 a request, right, for more information on?

8
9 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** We have been working on compatibility for quite
10 some time now. So, what we could do is to summarize what we have
11 now. Because remember, we already told the staff to do a lot of
12 things for April on priorities and we don't want to deviate from
13 the priorities that we have here. But whatever we can do to present
14 at the next Council, you know, things that we already have, this
15 is a list of possible regulations that could be examined whether
16 they are compatible or not. These are the list of species that we
17 consider. It could be changing their status within the management
18 unit, and then we can also say what it will take to do it.

19
20 Because what we will take is, really, what we are all after.
21 Because as it was mentioned by Kelly Denit at the meeting, some of
22 the activities that we need to undertake to fulfill what 14276 is
23 asking will require modification to the management plans. As you
24 also mentioned, this would take some time to follow the schedule.

25
26 But I think following your comment, that's a doable thing, just to
27 have a list of the things that will have no extra work for the
28 staff that we have now. And also, when we talk about the staff,
29 we're talking about four people. Actually, the four are right here.

30
31 You think that will do it, Heather, to have that list of the things
32 that could be considered for compatibility review and other
33 activities that we have that can be reviewed or looked at the April
34 meeting?

35
36 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Yeah. I mean, well, think it'd be useful. I guess
37 I'd like to hear from the other Council members, too, if they think
38 this is something it's worth spending time on in April to sort of
39 make some advances on implementing the deregulatory agenda.

40
41 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Sure. Yeah. Yeah. We are able to do that.
42 For the next meeting? Sure. Yeah.

43
44 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Yeah. We're going to request what
45 priorities you have. For example, the regulations on lobster and
46 queen conch, etcetera.

47
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** I know Saint Croix is ready. Our FAC, our DAPs,

1 we did our homework with Sennai. He worked with us, a lot, getting
2 all this prioritized. So, I don't know how it's working out on
3 Saint Thomas, and definitely, I don't know what's happening in
4 Puerto Rico.
5
6 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** As for Saint Thomas, I'll defer that to
7 Sennai because he would probably know more than me.
8
9 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yep. I mean, both districts have already provided
10 both their recommendations on policy action as well as priorities,
11 which we're working towards, as I've mentioned, and I'm working
12 with María on the two, I believe, that are associated with changes
13 that need to be made in federal regulations.
14
15 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Sennai, would you be open to presenting on that,
16 like, at the April meeting, sort of the status of--
17
18 **SENNAI HABTES:** Yeah. I can do that.
19
20 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** For the U.S.V.I.?
21
22 **SENNAI HABTES:** Sure.
23
24 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** That'd be amazing. And Daniel, I don't know the
25 same. Okay.
26
27 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Yeah, we're able to do that.
28
29 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you.
30
31 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** You're welcome.
32
33 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay.
34
35 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Clarification, two things. One, we're
36 thinking about all of the regulations that you have in place
37 regarding fisheries, right? Okay. And the second question is, could
38 you please, because we are trying to track the same thing that we
39 do with the Code of Federal Regulations, what we do and what the
40 actual mandate that it's in the Code of Federal Regulations, what
41 the references are for the regulations that are in place so that
42 we can keep track of that?
43
44 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Well, we need a simple list of the thing that
45 they are doing already for the next meeting. And yesterday, we
46 already decided for the next meeting, we need to allocate ample
47 time for the discussion of the thing that you agreed yesterday
48 that the staff is going to be working on. That's already have been

1 decided.

2
3 So, the only thing that we need in addition to what we said is
4 that as Dr. Sennai and I mentioned and you, you can have those
5 presentations, and we'll continue the conversation that we have.
6 And then we have to, at that time, identify what are the next
7 steps. I believe that's what Heather is looking at, to make sure
8 that we don't stop the action. I think that's where we are.

9
10 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So next on the agenda are the Advisory Panel
11 Reports. I'm not sure whether DAPs have anything this time around.
12 We only have Crespo here right now. Crespo?

13
14 **DAP REPORTS**

15
16 **NELSON CRESPO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I was talking with Gerson.
17 The DAP panels haven't had any individual meetings, so the three
18 of us don't have nothing to report at this time. If we celebrate
19 some meetings before the April meeting, we are going to be able to
20 report some. Thank you.

21
22 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, Nelson. Enforcement reports? Puerto
23 Rico, DNER?

24
25 **ENFORCEMENT REPORTS**
26 **PUERTO RICO DNER**

27
28 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** I am here, but my mind is traveling.
29 Sorry, guys. Okay. This is the Puerto Rico DNER Rangers Corp,
30 Enforcement Report prepared by Ricardo López. He is not here
31 because he's taking care of family business.

32
33 Also, we want to say thank you to Nelson Cruz Santiago, who is the
34 Commissioner of the DNER Rangers, and also, he's a Sub Secretary.
35 And also, Edwin Rodríguez Ruiz, who is a Sub Commissioner. And
36 Yamiré Pérez-Román. Thank you for all their help to do this report.
37 Next slide, please.

38
39 Okay. I think you're familiar with this slide. In the green square
40 at the left, we are able to see the Puerto Rico Fisheries Law,
41 278. We only have four cases with the Puerto Rico Fisheries Law.
42 However, at the right column at the bottom, another green square,
43 that is Regulation 7949, the name is the Puerto Rico Regulation on
44 Fisheries. And for that one we had 30 cases or 30 interventions
45 during the last three months.

46
47 The rangers were able to intervene with fisher who were using spear
48 gun and tank at the same time, but they were not commercial fisher.

1 Also, they were able to catch some people who were fishing for
2 some species during the closed season. Also, lobsters below the
3 legal minimum size. Conch below the legal minimum size. Fishing in
4 close areas or forbidden areas. Exceeding the number of queen conch
5 or exceeding the bag limits for queen conch. And an intervention
6 relating the conch harvesting. Next slide.

7
8 So, on the left column at the top, you will see the Fishery's
9 Regulation 7949 and the Fisheries Law 278. What is important to
10 mention here is that we had 20 interventions less than the previous
11 three months. Three months ago, the rangers were able to interact
12 with 50 persons. Now they only had 30, but they were very active.
13 I will show you some pictures of the intervention they made. Next
14 slide, please. Okay. Thank you. Okay.

15
16 Here, we are able to see some intervention with a recreational
17 fisher who caught 38 queen conchs, and the bag limit is only three
18 queen conchs, so 35 over. Fortunately, all conchs were alive and
19 returned to the ocean. Not so small, yeah. Next slide. Thank you.

20
21 Okay. Here we found another recreational fisher who was exceeding
22 the bag limits. The bag limit is three, and this person caught
23 seven. Unfortunately, the seven were cleaned underwater, so all
24 specimens died, but the person has been fined. Next slide.

25
26 In this next slide next slide.

27
28 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Liajay. Oh, she's trying.

29
30 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Oh, so sorry. Sorry.

31
32 **LIAJAY RIVERA GARCÍA:** Apologies. Liajay here. We're having
33 technical difficulties.

34
35 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Yeah. I see. I see. Yeah. Yeah. It's okay
36 because the computer is slow and I am slower, so it's fine. Okay.
37 It's fine. Thank you, Cristina. Sorry.

38
39 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** I also, I'm sorry that I am
40 interrupting you, but I also have to apologize because we are
41 having internet issues, and this presentation includes video, but
42 because of the internet issues I am not able to present the videos.

43
44 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Thank you. Thank you. It's okay. In this
45 slide we're able to see another recreational fisher, but he was
46 using gillnets at the lagoon at the municipality of Naguabo. The
47 fishers are not supposed to use gillnets unless they have a
48 commercial license, and nobody is supposed to use gillnets in the

1 coastal lagoon. So, this person was caught doing that, so the
2 gillnets were confiscated by the rangers. Next slide, and we know
3 it will have to take some time. Okay. Thank you.

4
5 In this picture, we observe a commercial fisher using gillnets in
6 the inner lagoon of San Jose, very close to the Isla Grande Airport
7 in Puerto Rico. And although he is a commercial fisher, again,
8 he's not supposed to fish with the gillnets in the lagoon. And,
9 also, this area is polluted. So, we're not supposed to fish there
10 and sell the fish because it's probably dangerous for human
11 consumption. So, again, the guild nets were confiscated and a fine
12 was issued to this person. One more slide.

13
14 In the next slide, we see a person who has an expired fishing
15 license and caught over 150 individuals of queen conch. The bag
16 limit for a commercial fisher is 150. He caught more than 150 and
17 also, his fishing license was expired. Everything was confiscated,
18 and he was a fined.

19
20 And the last slide is for questions. If we have internet, we will
21 be able to see a beautiful leatherback turtle, you know, walking
22 and start to lay eggs. Well, another day, will see that. Any
23 question? Graciela?

24 25 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**

26
27 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Mr. Chair, if I may? Can we go one back?
28 Is the fishing in Bajo De Sico done in federal waters, or was that-

29
30 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Oh, yeah. There is a comment, sorry,
31 didn't mention it, but there is a comment that the rangers were
32 investigating if they were able to confirm if this activity was at
33 the Bajo de Sico, where it is federal water. However, we don't
34 know the final result of this investigation, but they suspect that.

35
36 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Because Bajo de Sico is state but federal
37 waters are completely close to the fishing of queen conch.

38
39 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Right. Right. So, they are working on
40 that.

41
42 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** But the point is, Daniel, that no matter what
43 they were illegally caught.

44
45 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Right.

46
47 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Local laws and all federal laws, they are
48 supposed to be zero caught.

1
2 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Right.
3
4 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** So, I don't know what they're investigating, but
5 anyway.
6
7 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Yeah, we are waiting for the final result.
8 If they are able to confirm that.
9
10 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Okay.
11
12 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** We know it's not easy.
13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** We have a question from Joshua Quetel.
15
16 **JOSHUA QUETEL:** Hi, good afternoon, everybody. Joshua Quetel, DAP
17 member of Saint Thomas, for the record. As far as the-- let's just
18 use this one, for example, the commercial fisher who was operating
19 under an expired license. In this circumstance where he was caught
20 not only over his limit but with a expired license, is there any,
21 let's just say, consequences afterwards as far as renewing said
22 license, or is it just-- there is?
23
24 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Yes. This person received a fine and when
25 he--
26
27 **JOSHUA QUETEL:** Reapplies.
28
29 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Reapplies. Thank you. When he reapplies,
30 the office that gives the licenses will stop for a year or
31 something like that. They are able to do that. And he has to pay
32 the fine.
33
34 **JOSHUA QUETEL:** What is the fine, normally, let's just say for
35 something like this.
36
37 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** \$100 per individual.
38
39 **JOSHUA QUETEL:** Okay.
40
41 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** So, 150. Yeah.
42
43 **JOSHUA QUETEL:** I'm just curious if we have circumstances where,
44 let's just say, this particular fisherman is not, you know, some
45 people, they are fined worse than what they would make, kind of
46 thing. So, just to make it worse. It's a-- how do you say it? Like
47
48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Prohibiting.

1
2 **JOSHUA QUETEL:** Yeah. Prohibiting. You know? People realize that
3 breaking the law does not pay in these circumstances. That's what
4 I'm trying to get at.
5
6 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Hopefully, he will be fine.
7
8 **JOSHUA QUETEL:** Yeah. Alright. That's all.
9
10 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Thank you. Very good question. Thank you.
11
12 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Wilson?
13
14 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to add
15 to Daniel's answer. Yes, when a commercial fisher renews their
16 license in Puerto Rico, the process of review solicits a
17 certificate stating that he doesn't owe any fines or, like, the
18 statistic reports or anything. They look at that, and if he owes
19 the fine, and he hasn't paid anything, they won't give him his
20 license. But if he paid it, they give it to him.
21
22 **JOSHUA QUETEL:** Is there a point where the government would not
23 renew a license because of, let's just say, for example, a repeat
24 offender?
25
26 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** From what I know so far-- I don't know
27 if Daniel has that answer, but from what I know so far, I haven't
28 seen any case-- I don't know of any case where that happened.
29
30 **JOSHUA QUETEL:** Who actually issues the licenses in Puerto Rico?
31
32 **DANIEL MATOS-CARABALLO:** Thank you, Wilson. The licenses are under
33 the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources.
34 As Wilson mentioned, the Puerto Rico Fishing Regulation and the
35 fishing law do not stop a person after they were fined. So, once
36 they pay the fine, he's able to renew the license.
37
38 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** Yeah. But, yes, the secretary of DNER
39 and the director of the [sic] hunt and fish office, I don't know
40 how to say it in English, Caza y Pesca, they are able to stop. You
41 know? If they are in their second or third violation, they are
42 able to say, "No. You're not going to--" but I don't know of any
43 case like that. Thank you, Mr. Chair.
44
45 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Vance?
46
47 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** Yeah. A question. You said 150
48 individuals of Strombus Gigas, \$100 fine per individual. That's a

1 \$15,000 fine. I don't think no fisher-- I mean, that's probably
2 worth more than the yola and the engine, and maybe the fisher
3 himself, I don't know. No. I can't believe that. That would not be
4 paid. Or is there any evidence that they're paying those type of
5 fines? I don't believe it. Yeah. Wilson?

6
7 **WILSON G. SANTIAGO SOLER:** In some cases that I know, and I'm
8 sorry, Daniel, that I stepped in. The fisher that made the
9 violation went to a tribunal in the DNER with Josh from DNER, and
10 they always make an arrangement.

11
12 **VANCE P. VICENTE CERNUDA:** That's what I thought. Okay.

13
14 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alright. Okay. Thank you, Daniel. I saw on the
15 screen that DPNR enforcement was on there. Ramon McIntosh, but I
16 think he's logged off. Oh no, there he is.

17
18 **U.S.V.I. DPNR**

19
20 **RAMON E. MCINTOSH:** I'm still here. I don't have anything prepared
21 to show.

22
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you.

24
25 **RAMON E. MCINTOSH:** Yeah. But I'm still here.

26
27 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** And I believe that the Coast Guard is not
28 present. And also, OLE--

29
30 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Coast Guard has a presentation. They
31 sent the presentation, and they are here.

32
33 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Alright. Here we go.

34
35 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** James Butler.

36
37 **U.S. COAST GUARD**

38
39 **ENS. JAMES BUTLER:** Hello. Good afternoon. Can you hear me?

40
41 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. I can hear you. We can hear you.
42 And, also, are you able to share your screen if I make you a
43 cohost?

44
45 **ENS. JAMES BUTLER:** I don't believe I can. Are you able to share
46 the presentation that I sent?

47
48 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Okay. I will share the presentation.

1 Thank you.

2
3 **ENS. JAMES BUTLER:** Thank you. Let me know when you're ready and
4 I'll unmute again.

5
6 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** We're ready.

7
8 **ENS. JAMES BUTLER:** Great. Thank you very much. Yes. Good
9 afternoon, Council and team. My name is James Butler.

10
11 I am the deputy living marine resources officer at Coast Guard
12 Sector San Juan located in San Juan, P.R. Hope everything is going
13 well for you all over in Saint Thomas. I won't be taking up too
14 much of your time this afternoon. I only have one slide here.

15
16 Really, what I want to share is how the Coast Guard is
17 incorporating the living marine resources mission into more of our
18 day-to-day practices in Sector San Juan. Obviously, like every
19 organization, we're resource constrained and deal with competing
20 priorities.

21
22 But some of the ways that we have added to our LMR diet, so to
23 speak, in our daily operations is we have started implementing
24 quarterly surge operations in areas of interest for fishing
25 regulations practices. For example, as two of the restricted areas
26 in the Mona Passage, I believe it's the Tourmaline and Abrir La
27 Sierra fishing areas out west, closed on December 1st, we organized,
28 with the help of DNER, with FURA and with NOAA Office Of Law
29 Enforcement, to do a surge operation where we would deploy some of
30 our units from San Juan, some of our small boats, to the peers and
31 partner agency peers and the West Coast, and we'll deploy them
32 every morning and every afternoon to patrol those closed areas,
33 both, for enforcement if fishermen are seen in those restricted
34 areas, and we have to stop them and board, and for awareness as
35 well to talk to the fishing public, talk about catch limits, talked
36 about the seasonal nature of these restricted areas and getting
37 more face time with the public. Those are quarterly surge
38 operations that we've, started doing.

39
40 The current one is ongoing, and I don't have numbers or stats to
41 talk to you about right now. But for the most recent one, I think
42 we did a total of nine or 10 boardings for fishing vessels in the
43 Mona Passage, and we had aircrafts fly over the restricted areas
44 to create, you know, to create maritime domain awareness for the
45 assets to get underway and go and talk and communicate with the
46 with the fishing public.

47
48 Let's see. Another way that we've strived to increase our LMR

1 activities in the last three months since the last meeting was, we
2 conducted another Caribbean LMR boarding officer training in late
3 August on the 25th to the 29th. The Coast Guard does their living
4 marine resource training through regionalized training centers and
5 during late August earlier this year, the training team from the
6 Southern Region Fisheries Training Center or SurfTech made a trip
7 down to our base here in San Juan and trained up a few more living
8 marine resources boarding officers, including two more sent to one
9 of our smaller subunits in Saint Thomas. And now that we've
10 incorporated more LMR boarding officers into Saint Thomas, they
11 are able to conduct, I believe, weekly patrols out of Charlotte
12 Amalie Harbor and patrol those closed fishing areas to the South
13 of Saint Thomas.

14
15 One area where we continue to be resource constrained is the
16 restricted areas in the vicinity of Saint Croix. So, what we
17 attempt to do every so often is when our schedule allows for us to
18 have two of our major cutters underway, we station one of them
19 south of the Virgin Islands, south of Saint Croix, south of
20 Vieques, and do what we call boardings of opportunity, which is
21 these are multi mission assets. They're doing immigration. They're
22 doing counter narcotics. But as boardings of opportunity are
23 available to them, they'll do boardings for living marine resource
24 protection in the vicinity of those closed areas.

25
26 And finally, the last way that I'll share with you guys today about
27 how the Coast Guard is upping its resource management for living
28 marine resources is that we've started doing not daily, but semi-
29 daily law enforcement-oriented helicopter flights out of our air
30 station in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico. For these flights, they always
31 take off with a with a purpose in mind, be it for search and rescue
32 or for training or for law enforcement.

33
34 With these law enforcement flights, we've made a point to begin
35 using that time to fly over the secured or the restricted areas in
36 the Mona Passage for maritime domain awareness to keep track of
37 whether or not there are sightings currently for fishermen in those
38 closed areas. And when we see that, when we get that information
39 from the helicopters, we know that it's time once again to start
40 sending surface assets back towards those closed areas.

41
42 So, that's all I really had to pass to you all. Only one slide
43 from me. I'm happy to field any of your questions about the Coast
44 Guard and how we do this mission. But it's a pleasure to be here
45 and thank you all for your time.

46
47 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**
48

1 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. I have a question that I was
2 asked to present it. I guess Coast Guard would be the best person
3 to ask right now. We have fishermen on Saint Croix who traveled
4 south about 90 miles to Gibbs Bank, and they're kind of a little
5 paranoid right now with what's going on in Venezuela. They're
6 mostly pelagic fishers. So, they're not sure exactly what their
7 restrictions are. They just don't want to be targeted. Is there
8 any advice?
9

10 **ENS. JAMES BUTLER:** Well, sir, I absolutely understand the
11 apprehension and the worry from those fishermen. What I would
12 recommend is, firstly, that what we're referencing here is more a
13 product of the U.S. Navy than of the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard
14 is not operating so much in in those areas. Like, the geo position
15 that you referenced, 90 nautical miles south of Saint Croix. You'd
16 seldom see Coast Guard assets in that area.
17

18 Best advice as I can give is to follow the rules of the road, like
19 we call them, for vessels underway out in the high seas. You know?
20 Using things like high visibility lights while you're underway.
21 Use your fishing lights. You know? Keep your white over green up
22 and burning brightly. But for more, like, nuanced information on
23 how to operate in that regard, I would direct questions to the
24 public affairs office for the Department of Navy in Puerto Rico.
25

26 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Thank you. I'll pass that on to those
27 guys. Thanks a lot.
28

29 **ENS. JAMES BUTLER:** Yes, sir.
30

31 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Now OLE for NOAA. Is there somebody
32 online?
33

34 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes.
35

36 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay.
37

38 **MATTHEW WALIA:** Yeah. I'm here. Can you guys hear me?
39

40 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Yes.
41

42 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Yes. We can hear you, and I made you
43 a cohost so you can share your screen if you want to.
44

45 **MATTHEW WALIA:** Perfect. I appreciate it. Let me know when you can
46 see it. It's delayed with your Wi-Fi there, and I can get going.
47

48 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** We're seeing it.

1
2 **NOAA FISHERIES OFFICE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT**
3

4 **MATTHEW WALIA:** Okay. Perfect. Well, I appreciate everyone's time.
5 I'll be brief. I just want to give an update on where we've been
6 since the last meeting.
7

8 I'm Matt Walia, the compliance liaison. I'm based up in Saint Pete,
9 Florida. I want to let you know, before I get started, I just
10 wanted to address, I think it was Graciela earlier during the
11 outreach. She had some questions about how to contact enforcement
12 as far as closed areas and seasons and all that and vague limits.
13 We're always willing to take calls. We can take them. So, I have
14 my contact info. Council staff has it. A lot of you are familiar
15 with our special agent in Puerto Rico. He's not able to be there
16 today, Miguel Borges. And we also have a general email for law
17 enforcement in the Southeast area, and I can post that as well.
18

19 So, just, contact me or, like, counsel know. We can make sure that
20 everyone has our info on how to get. But as far as notices, I would
21 recommend signing up. There's a LISTSERV you can sign up for. Our
22 Regional Office is really good. They have some amazing comms folks,
23 and they always send out, updates on closure areas and what's going
24 on. So, I would recommend that.
25

26 But I wanted to give an update, and this piggybacks a little bit
27 on what you just heard from Coast Guard of trainings. That's always
28 an integral part we do working with our partners. Want to make
29 sure everyone's compatible and understands the regs.
30

31 As far as Sector San Juan goes, our agent in Puerto Rico that I
32 mentioned, Miguel Borges. He recently did two trainings at Sector
33 there, and a lot of it covered the federal violations, what to
34 look for, what the boarding parties can keep an eye out for, trends
35 we're seeing in the area. And then most importantly, how to put
36 that information together and get it over to us so we could
37 successfully prosecute it for a federal offense.
38

39 So, he did that twice. Those were really successful, and then he
40 was asked to actually participate virtually after the dolphin and
41 wahoo regulations that recently went effective, and he gave a
42 virtual training on that. He advised on job-aids that are also out
43 in the field as well. So, that was really good to get that out. He
44 also made his round over to the DNR Academy. There were about 40
45 new recruits that he trained and same principle on trends and how
46 to put a case package. So, that's been really successful in getting
47 information over to us.
48

1 I want to take this time. I actually heard a little bit of this
2 mention with lobster and seafood. But just as a refresher of some
3 of those folks that may not know a program that we do a lot of
4 enforcement for, SIMP. It's another acronym, but it's a Seafood
5 Import Monitoring Program. This is something that's been around
6 for a while since 2018. It's for vulnerable species to IUU fishing
7 or seafood fraud, and it's part of our mission to enforce that.
8 So, we've always enforced it.

9
10 There's definitely been an increase in priority and uptake in our
11 efforts in the Southeast Region. This has even hit in the Caribbean
12 as well in San Juan a lot as well. So, I just wanted to make you
13 aware of that, give you some background on the info if there's
14 questions. But, essentially, there's a lot of reporting and record
15 keeping requirements that importers have to show for their product
16 before it comes into the U.S., and a lot of it is traceability.
17 Right?

18
19 So, whether it's an aquaculture farm or a wild harvest, we need to
20 be able to see where it was harvested to that point of entry in
21 the U.S. And if something looks odd or maybe there's some fraud
22 going on, we're going to flag those shipments. We work with the
23 partners a lot with Customs and Border Patrol, U.S. Fish and
24 Wildlife, FDA even too when they're doing health inspections on
25 the seafood to make sure that it's proper coming in, and that helps
26 protect our domestic seafood integrity.

27
28 One example in San Juan, there's an importer there that had some
29 previous noncompliance. They got flagged again. We worked with the
30 SIMP program, and they were trying to import cod and shrimp from
31 Spain. The cod was actually via Iceland to Spain, and the shrimp
32 was from an Ecuadorian based shrimp farm. But it wasn't correct of
33 what he had. We couldn't show the traceability, so he ended up
34 getting a thousand dollar notice of violation assessment through
35 our general counsel. So, that's or I'm sorry. A summary settlement
36 that we had.

37
38 So, you did get fined for that a thousand dollars, but it's stuff
39 like that we're routinely inspecting seafood. And just so you can
40 see, I put this graphic on below. That's nationwide for the office
41 of law enforcement just this past quarter of what countries we've
42 inspected and seafood coming in. 11 different countries and almost
43 278,000 kilograms of seafood we've inspected. So that stuff coming
44 into the ports, the airports. We're making sure what's coming in
45 is good. And you can see The Bahamas actually has a lot of spiny
46 lobster that they're importing as well.

47
48 Updates on a couple recent cases. There was a fisherman that he

1 did not have his HMS Caribbean small boat permit, and he had an
2 incidental shark catch. We were able to handle that with a written
3 warning. So, just a reminder, do your due diligence and have
4 fishermen make sure they have the proper permits. I heard U.S.V.I.
5 was talking about helping fishermen with that. That's great to
6 hear. Once you have that small boat Caribbean, it's pretty easy to
7 acquire. It allows you retention, say, when you do have that
8 incidental catch, so you avoid getting any sort of penalty.

9
10 Another bigger one we had was, there was a commercial trap
11 fisherman in Hind Bank that's closed year-round. The vessel was
12 out of Puerto Rico, and this started from a tip from the public.
13 We end up going out. It was a joint patrol with Coast Guard. We're
14 able to document him fishing in the area, interviewed him. We saw
15 the traps in there and pulled them out. He ended up getting a
16 \$5,750 notice of violation assessment through our general counsel
17 enforcement section. So, that was good to see.

18
19 We had another case involving conch off the West Coast of Puerto
20 Rico. A fisherman illegally harvested it in federal waters, and
21 that was a \$2,500 penalty that he received as well. So, when we're
22 able to get these case packages, whether we start them in or work
23 with our partners, we can get some success out there.

24
25 I just had a couple reminders. I'm sure most folks that are online
26 in the meeting are aware, but a lot of close areas for Red Hind
27 are in effect right now. For the spawning areas, Bajo De Sico is
28 still closed all the way through March of next year. Tourmaline
29 and Abrir la Sierra just recently closed. So, they're there in the
30 seasonal Red Hind closure.

31
32 Anything on the West Side of Puerto Rico on EEZ waters, you cannot
33 even have retention form anywhere in there. So, just know your
34 boundaries. Know where you're going before you go out fishing.
35 That'll save a lot of angst and issues. Lang Bank is the other one
36 that just closed here on the 1st as well. So, just some reminders
37 to know your area. Be aware when you go out fishing.

38
39 I did want to put up, we always put this up, another way to contact
40 us. This is the violation line; anyone can report anonymous. If
41 you have questions, you can even send it this way. There's always
42 a duty officer online that will return a call depending on the
43 area. Just give the location as much detail as you can on stuff.

44
45 I would encourage the use-- Earlier in the discussion yesterday,
46 I heard some stuff talking about FADs. This would be a great
47 example, if you want to give some tips on FADs and the location
48 where they are in federal waters off of U.S.V.I. in Saint Croix.

1 Call this number. Leave us that info even though we no longer have
2 an enforcement officer currently there with our staffing.
3 Hopefully, that'll change in the future, but not right now.

4
5 But if we get enough tips and we can show something's going on, we
6 can do surge patrols. We're still coming over to U.S.V.I., with
7 things going on. Even if we don't have a JEA as well, it may not
8 be optimal, but we can work and try to get stuff over there the
9 more reports we get with something going on. So, just really
10 encourage help from the public and from the fishermen. Help keep
11 your fishing secure. Let us know what's going on, and we can help
12 you as well.

13
14 So, that's mostly what I had. Like I said, I didn't want to take
15 up a lot of time, but if there's questions, I'm happy to take them
16 as well. And thank you as always for the time to present. So, thank
17 you, Mr. Chair.

18
19 **QUESTIONS/COMMENTS**
20

21 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Thank you, sir. Any questions? Graciela?

22
23 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thank you for that. I have a question--
24 Well, no, I have a comment regarding some scientific activity that
25 we're hosting at the Tourmaline this year, starting tomorrow. There
26 will be a commercial fisherman on board with the scientific party.
27 There is no harvest whatsoever. It's all technology oriented. So,
28 just to let you know, because they will be carrying the proposal
29 and the letters that the DNER and we have provided for them. So,
30 they'll be working between now and April during the peak spawning
31 season at Tourmaline. But it's only one vessel.

32
33 **MATTHEW WALIA:** Okay. I appreciate the heads up. If there's no
34 fishing gear, I mean, usually, when there's fishing gear, you're
35 also getting a letter of authorization or something fishing permit
36 through this the NOAA Science Center. I don't know if that's the
37 case.

38
39 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** No. There will be no fishing whatsoever.
40 It's all passive work.

41
42 **MATTHEW WALIA:** Okay. All right. Well, I appreciate heads up. Maybe
43 I can get with you offline and get some more specifics on it just
44 for awareness for everyone. So, thank you.

45
46 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** Thanks.

47
48 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any more questions for NOAA OLE? Hearing none.

1 Thank you, sir.

2

3 **MATTHEW WALIA:** Alright. Thank you.

4

5 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Next on the agenda is all the business. Heather?

6

7

OTHER BUSINESS

8

9 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. So, upon further reflection
10 and discussion with my esteemed General Counsel colleague, Ms.
11 Kersting, I would like to rescind a motion that I made, following
12 lunch, to have you, Mr. Chair, choose to fill the vacancy on the
13 Saint Croix DAP from a list of MREP graduates that I'm going to
14 give to you. And so, rescind that motion now, and then we would
15 just deal with that appointment during the next during the April
16 Council meeting.

17

18 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Ann?

19

20 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** Just a little guidance. So, to rescind the
21 motion, you would need to make a formal motion to rescind. We can
22 pull up the prior motion on the screen to help with that. And then
23 we would need a second, and then you all would take a vote on the
24 motion to rescind.

25

26 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** And you also need a rationale. You also need a
27 rationale as to why. In this case, there's no need to rush to
28 appoint a person between here and April. So, there's no need for
29 this action at this time.

30

31 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Correct. There's no pressing reason to have the
32 person appointed between now and the next meeting. And at the next
33 meeting, there would be the opportunity for more fuller, broader
34 discussion of the potential candidates. So, I move to, is someone
35 going to put it up?

36

37 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Cristina is preparing it on the Zoom
38 so everybody on Zoom can see it. So, give her a second.

39

40 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Okay. Thank you. I move to rescind motion number
41 9.

42

43 **ANNE M. KERSTING:** Can we just copy and paste the language from
44 motion number nine just so that it's clear?

45

46 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Vanessa Ramírez, so moved.

47

48 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Vanessa, tienes que decir "second," not "so

1 moved."

2
3 **VANESSA RAMÍREZ:** Okay. Vanessa Ramírez, for the record. Second.

4
5 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Thank you, Vanessa.

6
7 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. So, the motion is to rescind motion number
8 nine: Motion to appoint a recent MREP graduate to the second
9 remaining vacancy on the Saint Croix DAP. The Chair will have the
10 authority to choose a graduate from the list of names that NOAA
11 Fisheries submits. So, that's been rescinded. Moved by Heather
12 Blough, seconded by Vanessa Ramírez. All in favor, say "aye."

13
14 **GROUP:** Aye.

15
16 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Any nays? Any abstention? Hearing none, *motion*
17 *carries.*

18
19 **HEATHER BLOUGH:** Thank you.

20
21 **PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD AND NEXT MEETINGS**

22
23 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. Public comment period. I don't know if we
24 have any. Going around.

25
26 **CRISTINA D. OLÁN-MARTÍNEZ:** Nobody on the chat or raised hand for
27 comments.

28
29 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** So, next meeting date. Okay. So, next meeting
30 date? Miguel?

31
32 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Tentative dates for 2026 are April 21st and 22nd
33 in Saint Croix, August 11th and 12th in Puerto Rico, December 9th
34 and 10th in Saint Thomas.

35
36 **GRACIELA GARCÍA-MOLINER:** December 9th and 10th?

37
38 **MIGUEL A. ROLÓN:** Yes. Let me say it again. April 21st to the 22nd
39 in Saint Croix; August 11th and 12th, Puerto Rico; December 9th and
40 10th, in Saint Thomas. And these meetings will be hybrid. It will
41 be in person and through the-- like this one.

42
43 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Okay. I want to thank everyone for their
44 participation. I want to again thank Alberto Fort for all his hard
45 work on our IT side, and happy holidays to everybody. Enjoy
46 Christmas.

47
48 **LOUIS ANTHONY BLANCHARD:** Drop the gavel.

1
2 **CARLOS FARCHETTE:** Meeting adjourned. It's 04:52PM on December 4th,
3 2025. [Gavel bang]
4
5 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on December 4th, 2026.)