

**PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION
SOUTH ATLANTIC STATE-FEDERAL FISHERIES
MANAGEMENT BOARD**

August 26, 2003
Arlington, VA

ATTENDANCE

Board Members

Bill Cole, USFWS, Chair
Damon Tatem, NC, Gov. Appte.
Louis Daniel, NC DMF
Kathy Barco, FL, Gov. Appte.
Benjamin Gregg, SC, Leg. Appte.

David Cupka, SC DNR
Buck Sutter, NMFS
Spud Woodward, GA DNR/CRD
Robert Mahood, SAFMC

Ad hoc State Representatives

Jack Travelstead, VA, VMRC
Catherine Davenport, VA, Gov. Appte.
A.C. Carpenter, PRFC
Roy Miller, DE, Div. of Fish and Wildlife

Tom Fote, NJ, Gov. Appte.
Bill Goldsborough, MD, Gov. Appte.
Howard King, MD DNR

Other Commissioners

Pat Augustine, NY, Gov. Appte.

Ex- Officio Members

Paul Piavis, Chair Atlantic croaker TC

ASMFC Staff

Nancy Wallace
Toni Kerns

Bob Beal
John V. O'Shea

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SUMMARY OF MOTIONS

Move to nominate Spud Woodward as Vice Chair.

Motion by Mr. Cupka; Second by Mr. Mahood. Motion passes.

Move to approve Maryland's Red Drum Proposal.

Motion by Mr. Travelstead; second by Mr. Cupka. Motion passes.

Move to restore the flexibility in the North Carolina Red Drum Implementation Plan to allow the Fisheries Director to raise or lower the current seven fish commercial trip limit while maintaining the 250K pound harvest cap.

Motion by Dr. Daniel; second by Ms. Davenport. Motion passes.

Move to approve the nominee for the Atlantic Croaker Advisory Panel as described on the July 31, 2003 list.

Motion by Mr. Cupka; second by Mr. Mahood. Motion passes.

Move to approve the 2004 budget recommended by the SEAMAP committee.

Motion by Mr. Cupka; second by Mr. Woodward. Motion passes.

Move to approve the concept to expand SEAMAP as outlined in the white paper.

Motion by Mr. Cupka; second by Dr. Daniel. Motion passes.

Move to adopt the new objective under Goal 3 to incorporate the expansion of SEAMAP for fisheries independent coordination.

Motion by Dr. Daniel; second by Ms. Davenport. Motion passes.

Move to adopt the revised goals and objectives as an improvement and update, including two new objectives under Goal 3.

Motion by Dr. Daniel; second by Mr. Mahood. Motion passes.

**ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES
COMMISSION**

**SOUTH ATLANTIC STATE/FEDERAL
FISHERIES MANAGEMENT BOARD**

Doubletree Hotel
Arlington, Virginia

August 26, 2003

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The State/Federal Fisheries Management Board of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission convened in the Washington Room of the Doubletree Hotel, Arlington, Virginia, August 26, 2003, and was called to order at 2:50 o'clock p.m. by Chairman Bill Cole.

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

CHAIRMAN BILL COLE: Good afternoon. I am Bill Cole, Chairman of the South Atlantic State/Federal Board, and I would like to call the board into session.

We have a pretty full agenda this afternoon. There are some agenda changes that I would like to bring to your attention right now. Number 6 is an action item, 7 is an action item, and now Number 11, SEAMAP, includes several action items that we need to address this afternoon.

We will be passing out the materials for Item 11 a little bit later for you. There are some other business items that I have. One of them is I would talk with you about what we will need to take up at our next board meeting, which will be in New York.

That agenda is also growing as the day goes on. Then I understood from Bob Mahood that there are two other items that he wishes to bring to the board's attention. I recognize Bob Mahood.

MR. ROBERT MAHOOD: I'm got two other items under Other Business. One has to deal with the project proposals this year, and the other has to do with the Southeast Aquatics Resources Partnership. Both are pretty much just information items, Bill, and I do have one handout at the time.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA/ MINUTES

CHAIRMAN COLE: Those two will be added. Are there other items for the agenda this afternoon? Is there objection to the agenda? Hearing none, the agenda is adopted.

You were provided copies of the proceedings from the November 19th, 2002, board meeting. Are there any comments, changes to those minutes? Seeing none, is there any objection to the approval of those minutes? Seeing none, the minutes are approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT

It is traditional we always like to have an open period for general public comment. Is there anyone from the public who wishes to address the board? As a note, you all help me to remember to accept public comment before we take action items today. I have a tendency to forget that on occasion. Thank you.

So no public comment, we'll move on the agenda. The next item we have is an election of a vice-chair. Right now we do not have one, and I would like to open the floor for nominations for vice chair. The chair recognizes David Cupka.

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR

MR. DAVID CUPKA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It gives me great honor to nominate for the position of vice-chairman Mr. Spud Woodward of Georgia.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Do I have a second?

MR. MAHOOD: Second.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Bob Mahood seconds. I have a motion from David Cupka and a second from Bob Mahood to nominate Spud Woodward from Georgia as the new vice chair. Any other nominations or actions? Seeing none, may I have a motion of acclamation?

MR. MAHOOD: So moved.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Mahood and seconded by David Cupka. Thank you, Spud. Spud is now our new vice chairman and I think he has a comment.

MR. SPUD WOODWARD: I'm not sure this was an act of confidence or an act of desperation; but, regardless of which one it is, I will be privileged to serve as vice chair and will do my best to give Bill the moral support that he needs to do his job.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Thank you, Spud, for your comments. Nancy will be working with us here. Let me introduce Nancy Wallace to the board. I think this is her first full board meeting. Let me tell you a little story about Nancy. Nancy is now saving us all a little bit of money on our travel. It seems that a recent event in her life allowed her so that when she rents a car now, she doesn't have to pay the premium insurance rates, and that event in her life was a birthday last Saturday.

So from now on, she gets a little bit rental rate on vehicles as she travels around doing the board's business. Nancy, welcome and we look forward to working with you.

MS. NANCY WALLACE: Thank you.

REVIEW OF MARYLAND'S RED DRUM PROPOSAL

CHAIRMAN COLE: The next item on our agenda is to review and take action on Maryland's red drum proposal. In the CD, there were several documents that were provided for your memory where Maryland approached us with a verbal change request, and then followed it up with a written change request to change some of the red drum proposals to in essence be more in compliance with Amendment 2.

These were circulated to the plan development team and technical committee for their advice and comment. Their comments were circulated to you and asked for your concurrence on approval of Maryland's revised proposal.

The record should be fairly clear here, but just for the record, I would like to have a motion and make a formal adoption of that motion. Nancy, you have some comments?

MS. WALLACE: I just wanted to go through a quick slide presentation to remind everyone of what Maryland's red drum proposal was and the new proposal that they have.

I would just remind everyone in Amendment 2 the regulations that were set forth were that all states must implement a bag and size limit which will reach a 40 percent SPR level. The size limit is 27 inches, and all states must maintain current or more restrictive commercial fishery management regulations.

Maryland's original proposal that they brought forth was a five- fish recreational bag limit and an 18 to 25 recreational slot limit. After going out to public comment, they have revised that.

Their new recreational proposal is a one-fish bag limit and an 18-to-27 inch total allowable catch. Then the new proposal is concurrent with Amendment 2 and it brings about a 40.6 SPR.

Their commercial regulations, the past regulations were a five- fish bag limit and 18 minimum size limit, and one red drum could exceed 27 inches. Their new proposal is an 18-to-25 inch slot limit and a five-fish daily limit. As the chairman stated, this all went out to the board and we got a list of concurrence.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Thank you, Nancy. **Do I have a motion to formally approve this action? Motion by Jack Travelstead and seconded by David Cupka to approve Maryland's request.** Is there any discussion? Seeing no discussion, is there any objection to the motion? **Seeing no objection, the motion is approved.**

We've had a second request, one from the state of North Carolina, asking us to reconsider and change a trip limit proposal. Dr. Louis Daniel, I believe you would like to carry that.

REVIEW OF NORTH CAROLINA'S RED DRUM PROPOSAL

DR. LOUIS DANIEL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Congratulations, Mr. Vice Chairman. In the briefing book or briefing package, there's a memo from me to Nancy and also a response from Bob Beal on the mechanisms by which we may make this adjustment.

I wanted to take just a minute, Mr. Chairman, and kind of go over the background of why we're making this request, and hopefully you will all concur that it's a reasonable thing to do.

In 1998 North Carolina took some proactive measures through our fishery management planning process to put some significant restrictions on the red drum fishery to stop overfishing and restore that overfished stock.

Those actions have been in place since the fall of 1998, well before the Amendment 2 restrictions came in. Through that process and through that timeframe, from '98 to around 2002, we were able to tweak the

trip limits to such a level that they kept us well below the cap, and in fact got us down even further than that and below even the target that we had set for ourselves in our plan, which was a reduction in the harvest that would get us down to around 150,000 pounds.

Once Amendment 2 was approved and implemented, it no longer permitted any variability in the trip limits. It says in Section 4.2 no relaxation of current fisheries management measures will be permitted, so that sort of stuck North Carolina at that seven-fish trip limit that we had in place when the plan was adopted.

That creates kind of a problem for us because, number one, our fishery management plan says that the fisheries director has that flexibility to raise or lower the trip limit due to variable circumstances.

Amendment 2 takes that flexibility away. What we know from tracking the quota and watching the fishery operate since Amendment 2 deliberations took place, was that we have been very successful in managing the commercial harvest of red drum as a bycatch fishery, and the landings have been significantly lower than either the cap or our goal.

In fact, for the 2001-2002 and the 2002-2003 fishing years, which the 2003 fishing year ends very soon, landings are down around 70 to 80,000 pounds, so well below the 250,000 pound cap, and that's with some pretty substantial recruitment events that have occurred over the last few years.

So based on a lot of fishery-independent information that we've been collecting, it seems fairly reasonable that a six or seven fish trip limit is appropriate right now, but new information and variable circumstances may result in a need to revise that trip limit to reduce bycatch.

We know that there are particular fisheries that operate during certain seasons of the year where there may be more bycatch than the seven fish; and while we're able to manage that appropriately, we may end up in a circumstance in the future where we will have excessive discards and need to be able to adjust that.

As we explained at the last board meeting on this discussion, there is no intent to really change it at this particular time; but, if we did feel the need to change it, we would certainly let the board know that we were planning to make these revisions.

Understand that we have put in all of the regulations necessary to prevent any directed fishery. There's a

50 percent bycatch allowance. They're only allowed to have 50 percent of their fish are red drum.

We've also implemented, in addition to plan requirements, a gillnet attendance requirement to reduce the unknown bycatch component in the fishery, as well as had a lot of the reduction in the fish over 27 inches, and really staying on top of this fishery to the best of our ability.

But, really, North Carolina got our front on this issue in '98 developing our plan. We had that flexibility built into our plan, just in these cases, and would like for the board's concurrence to give us that flexibility back.

And if I can, Mr. Chairman, I've prepared a motion to that effect and if I can get a second, I'll explain very briefly a couple of additional things.

I would like to move to restore the flexibility in the North Carolina red drum implementation plan to allow the fisheries director to raise or lower the current seven-fish commercial trip limit.

CHAIRMAN COLE: All right. I have a motion by Dr. Daniel. Do I have a second? **Second by Katherine Davenport.** Louis, you have additional discussion?

DR. DANIEL: Well, I just want to make mention of two things briefly and then perhaps others would like to jump in here. I would like to make mention that we would notify the ASMFC of any changes, and that all other commercial management actions, including the 250,000 pound cap, would remain in place with this motion.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Additional discussion on the motion? A.C.

MR. A.C. CARPENTER: Well, I guess it's related to the motion, but in Bob's memo, he refers to this requiring an addendum action. Can we have an update from staff on that?

CHAIRMAN COLE: Bob, could you clarify this for us, please?

MR. ROBERT E. BEAL: I think there's some uncertainty in the plan as to what the -- there is some ambiguity in there in Amendment 2 as far as North Carolina's situation.

Obviously, the 250,000 pound cap is set in the plan. The question that the plan doesn't clearly spell out is

whether or not North Carolina has the ability to manipulate their possession limit while maintaining the 250,000 pound cap.

The plan is almost inconsistent with itself in this regard. There's language saying that you can't relax commercial regulations. So, you could look at that as saying that increasing a bag limit is relaxing a commercial regulation, but there is also the 250,000 pound cap.

So if that's the limiting factor here and North Carolina, which is the only state that has a cap, if they can alter their commercial trip limit and still maintain that cap, the plan has enough ambiguity in it where the board could allow North Carolina to make that change.

I think if the board wanted to change the provisions of the amendment, it would take an addendum. In other words, if they wanted to change the 250,000 pound cap or clarify some of the uncertainty that is in the plan in either direction, then it would take an amendment.

I think there is enough latitude in the plan right now that if this motion were to pass, North Carolina would have the flexibility to change their trip limit.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Thank you, Bob. A.C., to that point?

MR. CARPENTER: Yes. I would feel much more comfortable if the 250,000 pound cap was included as part of this motion. I think Louis indicated that verbally afterward, but I would wholeheartedly support it if that were part of the motion, that the controlling factor would be the existing or the old cap of 250,000 pounds, and I think that would tie the thing so that you don't have that ambiguity.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Louis, to that.

DR. DANIEL: If I added the language "while maintaining the 250,000 pound harvest cap" would that satisfy you, A.C.?

CHAIRMAN COLE: The seconder, Katherine, agrees with this language change. Is there additional comment?

MR. HOWARD KING: A question for Pres. What process or method would you make for announcing or making notice of the change, and what

would you expect the maximum limit would be, if not seven?

MR. PRESTON PATE, JR.: How did I get dragged into this? I hadn't envisioned the process, but I'm sure we could come up with one. Let me make a comment and in the course of making that comment, Howard, maybe I'll answer your question.

There has been a great deal of debate at home about our red drum management measures, both for the commercial and the recreational sector. Red drum, for our state, carries with it a great deal of social and economic significance for both types of fisheries.

For those of you that don't know it, it is our state fish and it has a very long-lived heritage of importance to some of our coastal communities. The very fact that we do not allow the possession of fish over 27 inches has been a problem for us in maintaining support within those communities for what we need to do to rebuild this stock.

But, we have stayed the course with some very effective measures that show some clear promise for meeting the goals of the ASMFC plan and rebuilding the stock according to our expectations.

But, it continues to be a point of contention with a number of our fishermen, and they have appeared before our marine fisheries commission and our advisory committee a number of times wanting the commercial trip limit increased and have been very critical about the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission not giving us the opportunity to do that.

So far Louis and I have responded very clearly that they're focusing on the wrong question or the wrong issue, and that issue should not be whether or not the ASMFC lets us do it, but whether or not we should do it at all.

The answer that we've given in that circumstance is a resounding it doesn't matter what the ASMFC will let us do; we are not going to increase the trip limit on the commercial landings of red drum at this point because it's not the right thing to do.

It would cause us to veer from a very clear course that we have established in managing this species, and I suspect that course will be maintained and remain very clear to us in the near future.

However, as Louis pointed out, there could very well be some circumstances that we would consider important as the stock continues to grow and we

gather information to show that discards in the other fisheries that are not targeting red drum are significant and should be avoided with an increase in the possession limit for our commercial fisheries within that and below that 250,000 pound cap.

I think if we saw those situations developed, it would be incumbent upon us, obviously, to keep this board informed, and we could do that either through, if it's timely, a meeting of this board with an acknowledgement of what our intent is; or, if it's not timely, some other mechanism with e-mail conferences or letter conferences or whatever is necessary.

Again, to summarize all of that, we have no intention of deviating from the very strong commitment that we've made to maintain the growth of this stock, and the passing of this motion will not increase our opportunity to deviate nor diminish our commitment to meeting that goal. Howard, I may have left the second part of your question out in that.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Bill Goldsborough.

MR. WILLIAM GOLDSBOROUGH: I was wondering how often in recent years North Carolina has achieved that cap.

DR. DANIEL: I think we've exceeded it four times in the last twenty years -- I believe that's correct -- maybe five times in last, say, twenty years.

The average commercial catch has been around a 177 or 180,000 pounds. The cap was an arbitrary number that was put on by Dr. Hogarth back when the black and red fish craze hit the Gulf coast, and to try to prevent a similar circumstance from happening in North Carolina, put a precautionary cap on it.

We did exceed it a few years ago just because we had such an abundant year class of fish come through the fishery, and we were in the process of tweaking the regulations.

But now, as I indicated earlier, I think we've got the restrictions and regulations in place to keep it well below the cap, and we've got an in-house monthly monitoring program where we keep up on the landings and make sure that if we even begin to approach that cap we've got a mechanism, to shut it down right away and stop the harvest immediately. We don't run that risk any longer we don't believe.

MR. GOLDSBOROUGH: Just so I understand the motion, then, the intent is basically to reduce the extent to which discards are wasted?

DR. DANIEL: Yes, sir, in the event that a fishery develops. As Pres said, a fishery develops where there are unaccountable discards occurring in the fishery, we might want to increase the trip limit seasonally or by fishery. But, yes, the intent is to reduce the bycatch.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Louis or Pres, help me out, you would do this by proclamation?

MR. PATE: That is correct.

CHAIRMAN COLE: And when we do a proclamation, there is no advance notice.

MR. PATE: To anyone on this board you mean?

CHAIRMAN COLE: I can't remember the process, how it's done. You don't send out a pre-notice that says that you will issue a proclamation at such and such a time?

MR. PATE: That is correct, under normal circumstances we don't. There have been rare instances in the past where that has been necessary, but normally, no.

CHAIRMAN COLE: In that case, would it be possible, if you think that you had a problem in a fishery and needed to take action, that you would have a draft proclamation, and it could be faxed to the members with some sort of immediate return date by phone call or something. I mean, I think we can work out a notification process is where I'm trying to

MR. PATE: We can make that work; that's no problem. None of those situations would be of such urgency that we would have to initiate an immediate opening or change in the regulations. There would always be enough recognition of that need to provide the proper notice to this board, and I'm willing to do that, for sure.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Louis.

DR. DANIEL: To add to that, it would also be under a circumstance that we can describe, so we can attach to that proclamation a brief description as to why we're making this change and give the board an opportunity to concur.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Well, if the motion passes, since I'm right in the building with you, why don't we sit down and work out with Nancy and Bob an appropriate notification process, and we will advise the board what that will be and we can handle it that way. I think that would be the cleanest way to do it.

MR. PATE: That will be fine.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Is there additional board discussion on the motion? Buck.

MR. BUCK SUTTER: I just want to make sure I'm clear on this. So, basically you're just developing a bycatch allowance. There wouldn't be a situation where a fisherman could use this as a way to have a directed catch, and then just bring in 50 percent -- is it 50 percent by weight or by number?

DR. DANIEL: 50 percent by weight, but it excludes menhaden, so they can't just go out and -- the intent is to reduce the bycatch.

But, also -- and this is what I was explaining earlier -- from '98 to 2001, we really had to do a lot of experimenting with the various trip limits and regulations to make sure that we had the trip limit high enough to account for the bycatch but low enough to avoid a directed fishery, and we feel like we've accomplished that with some flexibility around that current limit.

MR. SUTTER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Bob Mahood.

MR. MAHOOD: I must have missed something here. Why would the board be notified in advance? Would the board, then, if they didn't like it, let Pres know about it or is it as a courtesy to let them know he is going to do it? I mean, I don't quite understand the pre-notification part of it.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Bob, I think that came from Louis, when he said earlier in his introduction of the motion, that he intended to notify the board or -- I'm sorry, my notes show ASMFC when they were going to do it.

Since they do do it by proclamation and the proclamation includes in it a justification for the action, it's a complete document, I think it's appropriate that the board be provided that documentation.

MR. MAHOOD: Okay, so it's a courtesy?

CHAIRMAN COLE: It's more of a courtesy, I think.

MR. MAHOOD: I didn't know if they were going to override Pres or what.

CHAIRMAN COLE: I am remiss in not introducing or acknowledging our new representative from the National Marine Fisheries Service, Buck Sutter from St. Petersburg.

Buck is the Deputy Regional Administrator in St. Pete; and on behalf of all the board members, welcome, and it's very nice to have someone from St. Pete sitting up here with us. John Merriner has been filling in most adequately, but I think he was glad to have you also. Welcome, Buck.

MR. SUTTER: Thank you, I appreciate it, and John did buy me a nice bottle of wine for doing this, by the way.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Are there any other board comments or discussion on the motion? Bill Goldsborough.

MR. GOLDSBOROUGH: Just a point of order, Mr. Chairman. It's true, I suppose, that only members of the board will vote, right, on the motion.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Let me clarify. This is the red drum plan, and all of the members sitting around the table that are participants in that plan are voting members.

MR. GOLDSBOROUGH: I see, thank you.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Is there any comment from the public on this issue? Seeing none, any further discussion? Is there objection to the motion? **Seeing no objection, the motion passes.**

The next item on our agenda is an update of Spanish mackerel stock assessment and Nancy is going to take us through that.

UPDATE ON SPANISH MACKEREL STOCK ASSESSMENT

MS. WALLACE: The South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council met in Cocoa Beach, Florida, on June 18-19, 2003. The Mackerel Stock Assessment Panel presented the 2003 Spanish Mackerel Stock Assessment and a variety of options

for management to consider. Those went out on the briefing CD.

The updated stock assessment did not change the status of the stock. It is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. However, the estimated value of MSY did change, and, accordingly, the MSAP evaluated a range of potential TAC's based on the current estimated ABC and a range of bag limits and allocation schemes.

However, since the stock is not overfished and overfishing is not occurring, the new estimates of MSY are about the same as the average landings, and the changes in MSY are due to the inherent difficulty and uncertainty in such estimates. The council decided not to take any framework actions for 2004.

The existing regulations will remain in place with a 7.04 million pounds total allowable catch, and the bag limit is fifteen fish from New York through Florida. The TAC is allocated on a 55/45 allocation between the commercial and recreational fisheries.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Any questions for Nancy on this? A.C.

MR. CARPENTER: The recreational size limit remain unchanged as well?

MS. WALLACE: That's correct.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Are there additional questions for Nancy? Seeing none, thank you, Nancy. Next on our agenda is Atlantic croaker stock assessment.

UPDATE ON ATLANTIC CROAKER STOCK ASSESSMENT

Before we start on that, let me say that I did attend part of the initial meetings of our stock assessment group. You should also note, if you will, that the croaker assessment is being done under the SEDAR outline and framework for doing assessments that's been developed at the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, and Caribbean Council level by our Southeast Science Center.

Furthermore, the Stock Assessment Committee of the commission has reviewed that process and has recommended it to the full commission as a viable process to be used for future stock assessments.

Having attended several of the meetings, they are very intense. Croaker is the species that we have

never done an assessment on, and it has been fraught with trying to find everything, of course. Paul Piavis is here today to give us an update on that and what we can expect in the future.

MR. PAUL PIAVIS: Thank you. The next slide will outline the timeframe which we're working on under this SEDAR process, which is certainly new to me. Its main goals, I believe, are to really increase efficiency and do this basically with multi-meeting days, and it really has made things go pretty smoothly.

First off, prior to the data workshop, of course, we had a call for data and we met in Baltimore at the beginning of April. Not only was the Stock Assessment Subcommittee in attendance, but the commission allowed us to bring in some outside experts, which were really helpful in hashing some things out, especially in life history issues.

The way the data workshop is really supposed to run, we didn't quite come out with a tremendous clean dataset because it was new to most everybody. Without that data workshop and what we got accomplished there and in subsequent e-mails, the stock assessment workshop would not have gone so smoothly.

So in June, end of June here, the staff and Dr. Williams from the NMFS Beaufort Lab got us some working space down there and we went through the stock assessment workshop procedure. It went pretty darned smoothly for all the work that was done.

We didn't come out with the final run with all the sensitivities and everything, but we had a pretty good framework. We explored a couple of different models.

Right now we're in the process of getting all the contributor's sections together. First off, John Carmichael from North Carolina was the Stock Assessment Subcommittee chair, and, of course, here in midstream he took another position.

So, we had a conference call and Janaka DeSilva from Florida graciously agreed to take over the Stock Assessment Subcommittee with John Foster from Georgia as his vice chair. They've been doing quite a bit of work together.

E-mails have been flying back and forth with different sensitivity runs and whatnot. In addition to doing this, Janaka is very good. He is very particular

about making sure that everything is documented so that the peer review will go smoothly.

Right now, actually, the first draft should be in the mail or e-mail so we can all spend the weekend reading over it, so we can discuss some of the sensitivity runs in the technical committee meeting, which will be down in Raleigh here next Tuesday and Wednesday.

We'll be on a pretty short turnaround time from there. This group is a really, really good hard-working group to work with and I am pretty sure that everything will be right on time for the stock assessment review down in Raleigh again in October.

But, as I say, we came away with a run that was pretty well received by the subcommittee. There were some changes that had to be made, but, again, that was all handled through e-mail. This next meeting will be to tighten up the draft report and we'll have to do some model tweaking in there, but basically we're pretty much on time for the review process.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Any questions of Paul? I've been informed that we should have a completed assessment by our December meeting for us to review, react, and take action on as necessary; is that correct?

MS. WALLACE: That's correct. After the peer review in October, the panel will get a finished report about two weeks after that, and that will be what the board will be presented with at the December meeting.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Any other comments or questions? Thank you, Paul. Pres.

MR. PATE: Well, I can't let this opportunity pass and note that Bob Mahood stole John Carmichael from me. Payback is hell.

MR. MAHOOD: I just tried to keep him off your back on the red drum.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Okay, any other comments or questions of the staff on this one? Yes, David.

MR. CUPKA: I would just like to ask Pres if Bob got blamed for stealing John, why you all are down there talking to Pat Harris.

ATLANTIC CROAKER ADVISORY PANEL MEMBERSHIP

CHAIRMAN COLE: Thank you. Nancy, we have to deal with the Atlantic Croaker Advisory Panel membership and there is a piece of paper here that we need to take action on.

MS. WALLACE: In the briefing CD's that went out, there was a list of the Croaker AP nominations. I believe these were nominated quite a while ago, before I even came on staff.

Tina and I wanted to make sure that this was still a current list, and also you may notice that the names that were in bolded on that sheet were nominated, but yet never approved by the board. If anyone doesn't have a copy of that, there are some extra copies on the back table.

CHAIRMAN COLE: David Cupka.

MR. CUPKA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to just go ahead and make a motion that we approve the nominees and I'm assuming they're still valid; and if not, maybe before the vote we can get some input from the states if we need to change them. I would like to go ahead and move that we approve the nominees.

CHAIRMAN COLE: **I have a motion from David Cupka to approve the nominees as described on the July 31, 2003, list. I need a second. Bob Mahood seconds.** For discussion, I think Roy Miller has his hand up.

MR. ROY MILLER: I don't see the document that was referenced back there.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Give us just a second here. While we're running this down, there are several states that have not provided any nominees. We certainly would be more than happy to include them, either now or by your written recommendation later.

Nancy says that we've made a mistake; the chairman has made a mistake, so she is going to read them into the record.

MS. WALLACE: From New Jersey, the nomination was Eugene Doebly, a recreational fisherman. We don't have any nominees from Delaware, Maryland, or Virginia.

From North Carolina, Brian Shepard, a commercial fisherman; also Billy Carl Tillett, a commercial fisherman, otter trawl; and Norman Bradford, Jr., a recreational fisherman. Those three are all from North Carolina.

From South Carolina, Donnie Griffin is already an AP member and has been approved by the board. We just want to make sure that is still current; and from Georgia, Chris Skipper, a recreational fisherman.

We don't have any from Florida. So at this time, after this board meeting, if there are more nominations from other states, we would appreciate those.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Tom Fote.

MR. THOMAS FOTE: I don't remember how many members were assigned to New Jersey. Are we supposed to submit a commercial name also, or what was the decisions on that?

CHAIRMAN COLE: Bob, I think, has got the right answer for you.

MR. BEAL: Actually, I don't have an answer, but, Tom, we'll look it up after the meeting, and we'll contact you and Bruce and find out what your current membership is and the number of spots that have been set aside for New Jersey.

MR. FOTE: Yes, because before it was not a big commercial fishery, and it is now becoming that; and if we are, I want to make sure some advisors are on there.

CHAIRMAN COLE: A.C.

MR. CARPENTER: Was there a slot for the PRFC as well; and if not, I would request that there would be one.

MR. BEAL: How about this, we'll notify the states of the current membership and all the current vacancies, or we'll notify the entire board; so if Potomac River Fisheries Commission doesn't have a spot and you would like to request one, we'll get a status check and get back to you.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Roy Miller.

MR. MILLER: That took care of my question. I just wanted to make sure we got the same information that New Jersey did.

CHAIRMAN COLE: What we will do is circulate this and ask everybody to update it. A.C., I think we left you off, but we'll get you on.

I have a motion on the floor to approve the ones in bold who are Eugene Doebly, Brian Shepard, Billy Carl Tillett, Norman Bradford. Is there any objection to approval of these individuals today through this motion? **Seeing no objection to it, these are approved today.** We will get this out to each of the state directors for further action and further nominations.

SEAMAP UPDATE

We now have SEAMAP on your agenda. As I mentioned a little bit earlier, there are several action items that we need to take care of today. Materials are being handed out right now; and as soon as you've got them, I'm going to let Geoff start out with his introduction and try to get us through this.

MR. GEOFFREY G. WHITE: Actually, as it's going out, Mr. Chairman, I can go over the brief items of interest at the top. There's no action on these. These are just updates.

The SEAMAP South Atlantic Committee and Joint SEAMAP Committee did hold their annual meeting on August 5th through 7th. The two action items are coming from that meeting. The minutes are done and are available upon request if you need them.

In terms of the commission staffing of SEAMAP, we've hired a new SEAMAP coordinator who will be starting next week, and they're going to be taking care of the all the committees, including this one, other than the data management work group, which is staying with me, just an alteration of staff duties within the commission.

The last page of this has the 2003 list of activities. I don't need to go through that; it's just there for your information. The final point or item of interest is the crustacean work group was tasked last year to compile information on blue crabs.

They attended one workshop earlier this year to obtain and compile information on the status of basically research and the biology of the animal.

The commission is going to be holding a second workshop this fall to look what the status of the stock is on a state-by-state basis and what each state is doing. That compilation report should be coming back to the South Atlantic Board in December.

The report, again, is going to be a compilation of existing information, and it will contain no specific recommendations. It was asked for the board and will be used to basically provide a forum for discussion about similar blue crab issues. Therefore, we're working to compile the information and not make any recommendations in that report.

The first action item is review and approval of the 2004 South Atlantic SEAMAP budget. It's been level funded again this year. Typically, that is \$365,387.

The trawl survey out of South Carolina and run for the whole region came in a full funding budget for all their stations, all their people. The age/growth sampling would have been the entire budget of \$365,000, so they had to look at different ways to cut costs.

We found a way to maintain the full number of stations and minimize the age/growth sampling. What that means is they cut out the histology sampling. They used to do three species of otoliths and histology.

They cut it down to only croaker and weakfish, otoliths only, and they can maintain that for next year as it has been a South Atlantic Board priority, and the committee and the trawl survey personnel wanted to continue that as well.

The total budget actions, down at the bottom of this section, ASMFC is about \$48,000. That again pays for the coordinator and the meeting travel. The trawl survey was funded at \$327,000 to perform the stations and the minimal age growth. That was actually \$10,000 over our level funding, but we got NMFS to provide an extra \$10,000 for this year, although that is not expected to be granted again next year.

That ends us with a total budget for 2004 of \$375,387. The other item to note is that bottom mapping was funded under last year's grant, but they weren't able to use the money this year. They're rolling that over into 2004, which means there will be bottom mapping activities in 2004, but it's not funded through the 2004 budget. It's a rollover from '03.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Are there any questions of Geoff? As the business manager and approval for our portion of the SEAMAP program, we'll need a motion and a second and approval of this budget.

If this motion is approved, then Geoff will go back to work and bring us an operational plan for this budget at our December meeting. David.

MR. CUPKA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. **I make a motion to approve the budget as recommended to us by the South Atlantic SEAMAP Committee for the coming year.**

CHAIRMAN COLE: **Seconded by Spud Woodward. I have a motion by David Cupka and a second by Spud Woodward to approve the budget as recommended to us by the SEAMAP South Atlantic Committee; that budget total being \$375,387.**

Is there discussion on the motion? Seeing no discussion, is there objection to the motion? **Seeing no objection, the motion passes.**

Again, we will have an operational plan developed for your approval at the December meeting in New York based on this budget amount. Now, Geoff, you have some larger items next that you need to take care of?

MR. WHITE: Correct. The second item for action is discussion of the expansion of SEAMAP regarding fisheries-independent coordination. This was discussed by the South Atlantic Board, I believe, last December and the point of this is expanding the scope of SEAMAP to be able to include fisheries-independent data not actually collected by SEAMAP.

Right now SEAMAP only includes data that they collect. The coordination would also expand to NEAMAP to the north as that program is developing, and then ACCSP and FIN, which do the fisheries-dependent work.

The expansion has been approved by the policy bodies of both the Gulf and Caribbean. Based on the request for more information from the South Atlantic Board, the white paper was developed, which I think was distributed to you via mail last week. The main points in that are that the expansion would allow SEAMAP to begin providing fisheries-independent data collected by others.

It also provides for the ability to summarize data and provide trend information in the most usable format for assessment and managers. The point is to make fisheries-independent data as easily available to scientists and managers to perform assessments as it is the ACCSP goal for the fisheries-dependent data.

It is recognized that this type of expansion would require additional funds. However, the joint SEAMAP committee has agreed, and it's in the second paragraph of the white paper, that any new funds would be used to restore existing sampling programs to their full level before addressing any levels of expansion.

The expansion, in terms of including the data from other surveys, would still need to be decided on a case-by-case basis through the joint SEAMAP committee, primarily looking at state-run surveys instead of academic-run surveys.

Finally, the expansion would complement the goal of an integrated fisheries information system, as its going to be built, compatible with ACCSP and FIN, the coordination at both a staff and a committee level between SEAMAP, NEAMAP, and ACCSP and FIN to pursue the whole picture of fisheries dependent, which is ACCSP and FIN, and fisheries dependent, which is more of the SEAMAP and NEAMAP purview. So with the white paper is really the concept base.

The first action is that the committee recommends to the South Atlantic Board to adopt the concept of an expanded SEAMAP as outlined in the white paper. I'll take any questions on that.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Questions of Geoff? Louis.

DR. DANIEL: Geoff, the only thing I don't see in here, and the only thing that does concern me just a little bit -- and I'll bring this up and maybe no one else is concerned and I'm by myself -- there needs to be some aspect in this SEAMAP program for some type of a quality control type of circumstance when people access these data.

When they go in and pull out say the SEAMAP Spanish mackerel CPUE and use that in an assessment and say, well, I got the data from SEAMAP, so it must be good when, you know, they caught three fish over fifteen years and the index is 0.0001.

You know, we're running into that problem now with these data out there and available through these various programs. People don't understand the metadata and some of the issues behind the collecting of some of these data, and so the use of those data are inappropriate by outside parties.

I would like for maybe not to object to the motions or actions to take, but just have SEAMAP be thinking about some kind of a measure, that when somebody requests these data, we need to follow up on how those data are used and make sure that they're not being used erroneously.

I don't know if you all have talked about that or not. We're discovering in North Carolina at least that is becoming more and more of a problem as more and more data become available to more and more people.

MR. WHITE: Actually, the data management work group, as well as the SEAMAP committee, have talked about that in wanting to provide adequate metadata along with the information that is sent out.

They're starting to talk about the point about providing the data in summarized form and trend information, providing it in a useful way so that it's not combined incorrectly or at least sent out incorrectly.

Unfortunately, they do recognize that as the program is built to disseminate data, they can give the metadata and the warnings, but the current feeling is that you can't prevent misuse of the data completely.

You can merely give the data with information about it. But, in terms of requesting them to look into that further and come up with a process or a means to follow up, that could be done.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Louis.

DR. DANIEL: Well, I'm glad to hear that you're talking about those issues, and I think we need to continue to talk about them. I just think that there needs to be more coordination certainly in the South Atlantic on these types of data that are available and what is available and how it's available.

I mean, we've gone through some rigorous SEDAR approach processes that work fabulously. But, you know, to discover that there may have been a SEAMAP index available for one of these species and we didn't even know it until after the process had concluded, there needs to be more of availability, but it needs to be available in the correct format, if you understand what I am saying.

I just urge us to be careful with that. When we have these SEDAR approaches, it may be nice to have a SEAMAP representative, if we're using their

information, at the table so that they can explain yes or no, that these data are being used correctly. That's it. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN COLE: David Cupka.

MR. CUPKA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We had quite a bit of discussion at our last board meeting on this particular issue. Susan and I were both somewhat concerned about it. I don't want to rehash that.

I think SEAMAP has been a successful program over the years, despite the fact that it has been relatively level funded for a number of years, but yet the three components have worked together well and have managed to make some decisions.

I continue to have some concerns about the magnitude of what they're asking to undertake, and it is the fishery independent parallel with ACCSP; and, in fact, in my mind it's even much more complex than ACCSP.

It is not going to be cheap to do what they want to do, and it will be competing with other programs like ACCSP for limited federal funds. That being said though, I don't want to speak against it.

If they're able to do something, I'm all for that because I think there is a need for it, but it's a tremendous, tremendous undertaking. I mean, it's difficult enough to try and coordinate the fisheries-dependent information.

When you start talking about fishery independent, there's a lot of survey work going on out there; and if they're willing to try and do that, the more power to them. I don't want to stand in their way.

I'm just a little concerned about the magnitude of the task and the fact that in order to do it, they're going to have to compete for limited federal funds that we're all competing for. So, again, not to belabor it, and I certainly will not vote against it, but I am concerned about what they're suggesting and continue to be concerned.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Well, David, to your point, this board has had several long discussions about what to do, and, unfortunately, we have been essentially level or slightly headed-down funded for a number of years with this program.

My sense is that, yes, this is a lot of work. I also have a sense that with our new SEDAR process in the

commission, with the SEDAR program in the Gulf, South Atlantic, and Caribbean, that SEDAR participants are going to really wish they had all this stuff at some point, as Louis pointed out.

Obviously, with the funding situation that we have, we're a long ways from even starting this. I mean, we've got things that we have to go back and restart and finish before we start some other things here.

Nevertheless, though, I think what they are recommending to us and, Geoff, please correct me if I'm wrong -- is that this is for the long-term future to help to feed the assessment processes that we have in place right now. Is that correct?

MR. WHITE: That's correct, and it's also to approve the concept of moving in this direction. It's not expected to make great strides in the next year on this.

But it does change a little bit of the -- it adds one goal to the goals and objectives of SEAMAP and broadens the scope a little bit. If you approve of the concept, the next step as an action item is to look at the language of that objective under Goal 3.

CHAIRMAN COLE: David.

MR. CUPKA: Again, Mr. Chairman, I'm not speaking against it, and I don't want to discourage them from doing that, but I would not say it changes the scope a little bit. It's going to change the scope a lot, but that's fine and good. It's a huge undertaking.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Geoff, have the other parties approved all of this?

MR. WHITE: Yes.

CHAIRMAN COLE: So we're the holdouts again, right? David.

MR. CUPKA: Mr. Chairman, just to move us along, **I'll go ahead and make the motion that we approve the concept of expanding SEAMAP as outlined in the white paper.**

CHAIRMAN COLE: Mr. Cupka has made a motion. Do I have a second?

DR. DANIEL: Second.

CHAIRMAN COLE: **Louis Daniel has seconded. The motion by David Cupka and**

seconded by Louis Daniel is move to approve the concept for SEAMAP as outlined in the white paper. Is there any discussion on this motion?

MR. CUPKA: Mr. Chairman, the motion is to approve the concept to expand SEAMAP as outlined in the white paper.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Is there discussion on the motion? This is going to really expand this program, but we are joining the Caribbean and the Gulf units in trying to develop what ultimately is going to be needed to drive our stock assessments.

Is there additional discussion on the motion? Seeing no additional discussion, is there any objection to the motion? **With no objection to the motion, the motion passes.**

Now, Geoff, you said that if this motion passed, there had to be some language added under Goal 3?

MR. WHITE: Correct. Under Goal 3, the first highlighted bullet, which is also in bold, states: "Identify and describe existing fisheries-independent databases and activities that are of value to assessments of living marine resources and coordinate and integrate these, where possible, with the SEAMAP database." The committee requests that be added.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Louis.

DR. DANIEL: That is going to be tough, and what I want to make sure that they do, when they get moving on this thing, they're going to have to look at these other fishery-independent databases.

They're going to also have to look at their own databases and see which ones are appropriate to use, and I'm not exactly sure how they're going to do that. But, you know, there's no reason to be pulling in a lot of independent information if it's unusable.

I think the key here is where it says "are of value to assessments", and so if you start bringing in a bunch of bay anchovy data or tonguefish data or things like that that really don't have a whole lot of use for assessments, I think the focus should be on looking at those principal species in the SEAMAP program, which are usable as an index of abundance, then looking at the other programs and seeing if they, too, are reasonable measures of abundance; and if they are, how they match up and how they fit in and how those various independent indexes match up with each other over various time scales.

I think it's important that they do it that way. Otherwise, if there's not some recognized way of putting these things together in logical pieces, it's just going to be a jumble of a bunch of information and then we're going to kind of say, oh, gosh, now what do we do.

I think we need to start with a species and then kind of work their way down them like that. I really do encourage you to do it that way. That way, it would be an extraordinarily valuable tool. If they started on something that we're in the process of working on, it would be a big help to have some of that information vetted through the SEDAR process.

MR. WHITE: That's a good suggestion and I believe that's the intent.

CHAIRMAN COLE: The action then that we will need to do, if there's no further comment on that bold language, we're going to need to make a motion and a second and have it formally adopted as part of the official document.

DR. DANIEL: So moved.

CHAIRMAN COLE: **Louis moves the adoption of the new objective under Goal 3 to incorporate the expansion of SEAMAP for fisheries-independent coordination. The motion is by Louis Daniel. Katherine Davenport has seconded.** Spud has a question.

MR. WOODWARD: I'm just not sure if that captures what we're getting to here. Is that what it says? Okay.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Further discussion? Bob, you had a question.

MR. MAHOOD: What about the rest of the shaded language? Is that going to be another motion or can you do it all at one time?

CHAIRMAN COLE: Geoff.

MR. WHITE: We separate that as a separate motion only because those are general improvements and updates to the goals and objectives that did not hinge on the fisheries-independent expansion. We just separated it as a slightly different item.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Additional questions

on the motion? Any discussion on the motion? Seeing no discussion, **is there any objection to the motion? Seeing none, the motion passes.** Okay, Geoff, you've got one more.

MR. WHITE: As the committee was looking at the goals and objectives and the issue of expansion, they looked at the existing goals and objectives for SEAMAP. Currently there are five, and they basically reorganized them down into three that made a little bit more sense.

All of the bullets that are not highlighted are exactly the same as what is in the existing SEAMAP management plan. They're just under slightly different goal statement headers. The intent really is not changed.

The two at the bottom, provide data summary and trend information of SEAMAP data to support assessment and management, in the past SEAMAP had primarily provided raw data only and let other people create the indices, et cetera.

This is just providing the data in a more useful format to make SEAMAP a more usable program in terms of data users, and, secondly, to bring the management plan up to the times of ACCSP and FIN and coordinate data management activities with ACCSP, FIN, and other existing programs which would include NEAMAP when they come online.

Those are just types of improvement and updating of the goals and objectives and a little bit better organization, and we ask for the board's approval of that.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Louis.

DR. DANIEL: Just a question, Geoff. I certainly agree with the second one, and the first one I agree with as well, but that would only come after you've accomplished the bolded, shaded one, right?

You will only provide those data summaries and trend information after they've gone through the review that we just talked about, the identify and describing the existing fishery-independent databases?

Once that has been identified and summarized and everything and gone through that process, then it would disseminated and not before, if I understand this correctly.

MR. WHITE: That's correct for data collected other than SEAMAP surveys. These last two would also pertain to how we present data that has been collected by SEAMAP for the last fifteen years. It's better presentations of the data that we've already collected.

DR. DANIEL: Okay, I move approval of that action.

CHAIRMAN COLE: **Louis Daniel recommends that the revised goals and objectives be adopted as an improvement and update, including two new objectives highlighted under Goal 3.**

MR. MAHOOD: **I'll second that.**

CHAIRMAN COLE: Bob Mahood has seconded that. Additional discussion on the motion? Objection to the motion? **Seeing no objection, the motion passes.** Thank you, Geoff, we finally got it.

MR. WHITE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the board as well. One note that I forgot to add was the SEAMAP committee chairman, Dale Theiling, wanted to be here to present this to you, but was unable to because of state travel restrictions. He would have preferred to have done this himself, and we're hoping that he'll be able to make it up in December to speak with you.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Thank you, Geoff, a job well done and please express our appreciation to your committee members. Under Other Business, I am going to take up the winter meeting last, and Bob, I suggest that you go first.

MR. MAHOOD: This has to do a little bit with what we talked about a little earlier, the SEDAR process, which is a new stock assessment process we've implemented in the Southeast. It's kind of structured somewhat similar to the SAW/SARC process in the Northeast for doing stock assessments.

We've added another component. SEDAR, actually, just so you know what the acronym stands for, it's the Southeast Data Assessment and Review. That doesn't make a whole lot of sense, but when you put it together as SEDAR, you've got something to go by, anyway.

But, SEDAR is a process that will include both the Atlantic States, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, the Caribbean Council, the South Atlantic Council, and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery

Management Council, and we're trying to develop, or we are developing a coordinated stock assessment process.

The process has three components. One is the data workshop where we get various scientists together with the right expertise to agree on the data to be used going into the assessment.

The second phase is the actual review workshop where the stock assessment takes place, and the third component is the review workshop where we bring outside experts and other individuals into the process to review the stock assessment.

It has been quite successful so far in the fact that the stocks of fish we've looked at, they've been very controversial; and when we got to the endpoint, there was pretty much agreement that's where we were based on the level of data we had available.

Then that brings up the reason I am here today and that's the level of data that we have available, which in the Southeast is quite lacking for a number of the species. I might go back just a step.

The South Atlantic Council is going to coordinate the administrative activities of the SEDAR process in the Southeast and we were fortunate to get John Carmichael to come on board, who will be in charge of that process.

John will be out there involved in a number of stock assessments, both for the Atlantic states, Gulf states, Caribbean, and the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic Councils.

What we've done in house is we've looked at the proposals that were put into the ACCSP program this year; and if you'll turn to the backside of your sheet, and our staff looked at the proposals based on the needs within the SEDAR assessment process.

You'll see that North Carolina has a project. South Carolina evidently didn't turn one in this year. Georgia has one, Florida has two, and the National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Fisheries Science Center turned in three projects that will all add to our ability to conduct stock assessments in the Southeast.

The purpose of this is to provide this to the South Atlantic states for their information and coordination of support for these projects.

Last year I think we had a number of projects that would have been useful, but we really didn't sit down

and look at what would most benefit the states and the federal agencies in the Southeast relative to our data needs.

Mr. Chairman, I'm just going to do it for information and provide this. You can do with it what you want, but this is what we need, and these represent our states in the Southeast that have turned in proposals.

I guess what we're asking is for your support in the review process, those appropriate that may be reviewing the proposals. Beyond that, I don't think we need to take any action.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Any comments to address to Bob on this issue? Spud.

MR. WOODWARD: I just wanted to reinforce what Bob is saying, and particularly to point out that Projects 5 and 6, although they were submitted by NMFS, are actually going to involve direct cooperation by all the South Atlantic partners.

I mean, this is what we've been working towards is getting everybody working towards making the available data the best it can be. We've already got some infrastructure and this is going to capitalize on that available infrastructure.

It can make a big difference when we sit down at the council and at this body and deliberate over these things. Instead of looking at the holes, we might start filling some of those holes.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Very good point, Spud, and I appreciate it. Louis.

DR. DANIEL: And just to speak to that point, too, and the need to look at the level of unknowns in the South Atlantic's area of jurisdiction, we've got a lot of critical data gaps in the South Atlantic, probably more so I think than anybody, if I'm not mistaken.

A lot of these cooperative studies would give us an opportunity to collect a lot of much-needed data on a lot of unknowns and get those off the report to Congress, which don't tend to look real good. So, thanks.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Any other comments? Thank you, Bob. I can tell you that when I put on my other hats in a couple of weeks, this is going to be very useful, at least as guidance, to make sure that everything is integrated.

For those of you who don't remember, about two years ago or even last year, we had, from the Southeast at least, several proposals where the proposers had not talked to each other, and they made it very, very difficult to handle through the proposal review and approval process.

We had to basically call them all up and get them to rethink what they were doing and this sort of stuff. I think the effort that has been put into this year's proposals, as was noted this morning at the ACCSP Coordinating Council meeting, has been outstanding. We have way under more proposals than we've got money, but that's good in my book. With that, Bob, did you have another item?

MR. MAHOOD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and this again is an information item. We find ourselves on the council and I think some of the marine agencies at the state level in kind of a different kind of partnership.

We've become involved in the Southeast Aquatics Resources Partnership and is administered mainly by the Fish and Wildlife Service and includes all of the inland states in the Southeast, not only within the National Marine Fisheries Service region, but also within the Fish and Wildlife Service region, which are a little bit different.

One of the things -- and I mean this in no detriment to these folks -- is that you'll realize how much further we are ahead in the marine area relative to cooperation and organization than they are in the interior.

We've been involved in this. I know Dave Cupka has been involved and Spud and I don't know who else sitting around the table. Buck has been involved and Anne before Buck and a number of people. There's also a lot of the states are represented by their freshwater component or the inland part of the agency component.

It's a very interesting partnership. The mission is a typical grandiose mission with the partners to protect and serve, restore aquatic resources, including habitats, throughout the Southeast for the continuing benefit and use and enjoyment of the American people.

Well, that's an admirable goal that I think we all have. This partnership, I think we probably have had about four meetings maybe, David, and maybe five, and it's moving along pretty good. There's several key areas of focus that the partnership is looking at.

One is public use, fishery mitigation, imperiled fish and aquatic species recovery, interjurisdictional fisheries, aquatic habitat conservation, and aquatic nuisance species.

I missed one meeting and I ended up on the aquatic nuisance species committee. I don't quite understand it. I think it was the lionfish off of North Carolina they were thinking of, I'm not sure what.

It's an interesting group. It kinds of reminds me of the beginnings of ACCSP when we all got together and we were thinking, oh, this is an impossible task, we'll never get everybody working together on these types of things.

This is kind of ACCSP to the ten power because there's so many things that they need to work together on. We in the council, we're kind of at the end of the river and out in the ocean based on what these folks are doing.

I've been participating because of that. The effects on river systems and inland activities we all know affect our environments and ultimately all of our fisheries resources, so we have been participating.

I just wanted to bring this to everybody's attention. If you're not participating, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission has been very active, and I think the ASMFC has been invited to participate. You're certainly represented by the South Atlantic states. A number of the states have been sending folks.

I want to make you aware of it. One of the things that we're working on now and for this thing to fly, they're going to present this program at the Southeastern Fisheries Association meeting coming up, I think in October; and if that is accepted, at some point they're going to be developing an extensive memorandum of understanding between all of the partners of how this whole thing will work.

I just wanted to bring this to your attention. It's going on. When I went to the first meeting, Anne and I and David we kind of sat back tongue in cheek and were kind of smiling about what was going on. We had a facilitator, he was kind of easy to rattle and us folks from the marine area, I think he wished we would kind of go away.

But as it has progressed, things have gotten a little bit better and I think they've developed focus, and it may be something that is going to benefit all of us

here in the future. I just wanted to make you aware of it, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Thank you very much, Bob, for that excellent presentation. On behalf of the Service, I would really like to thank you from the council and from several of the southern state directors for your participation.

I can say that you have aggravated the facilitator I guess sufficiently that it has kept the direction of this partnership to an inclusive program that is definitely needed for our Southeastern resources, and on mine and Wilson's behalf, we want to thank you for those long trips and grueling sessions, I'm sure, to get it done. David, did you have any comments on it?

MR. CUPKA: I think Bob covered it fairly well. It is kind of interesting that some of the other regions of the Fish and Wildlife Service are sending participants to these meetings because they feel like the Southeast, even though we feel they're catching up to a certain extent, they feel like the Southeast is ahead of them.

You'll recall that Fish and Wildlife Service had a big national meeting and Director Williams was there, and they talked about putting "fish" back in Fish and Wildlife, and now they're developing some plans, documents, and some of this will fit right into it, at least for the Southeast component. We'll see what comes of it. We've still got a long ways to go.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Vince, I do think that while the commission has been well represented, your participation in some way would be much appreciated. Any questions of Bob?

Nancy and I have been putting together a list of things we must do in New York. When we are in New York, which is our next meeting, in all seriousness -- and that will be in December -- we need to take up our annual plan reviews, compliance reviews.

We'll need to take action on the croaker assessment that we discussed earlier. The blue crab report should be out from SEAMAP at that time.

I've talked to Lisa Kline, and my intention would be to invite all of the commissioners interested in blue crabs to our board meeting for that and the other reports. That seemed to be the easiest way to handle that and not have to create a separate meeting just to handle the blue crab issue.

We'll need to take up the 2004 operation plan for SEAMAP based on the budget we approved today. To the state directors that are dealing with SEAMAP, I would like you to think about how we might get together with our counterparts in the Gulf and the Caribbean to start to look at our SEAMAP funding situation.

I don't know that today is the time to do it, but I think in the next couple of months we need to give some discussion about the situation with the SEAMAP level funding, and maybe at that point we will have something to take action on. Are there any other suggestions for our December meeting? Louis.

DR. DANIEL: No suggestions but a question on the other one. You indicate we're going to take up the croaker assessment at our December meeting. What is your vision, Mr. Chairman, of where we're going to move from that point?

I mean, assuming that the assessment that has gone through a pretty rigorous peer review is endorsed by the board, then for the folks at home, what would be the next logical step?

CHAIRMAN COLE: Well, we have a plan and the plan doesn't really have any compliance items in it, as I recall. The issue that will be before the board in December will be based on the assessment that we have, what actions, if any, are needed?

Are there any preemptive, proactive things that we need to -- let's assume that the assessment comes out okay. I mean, you can assume all kinds of things, but it's too early to do that today.

But based on how that assessment comes out, I think that the board needs to decide what is the appropriate course of action to continue hopefully the good health of that stock; and if it's not in good health, what we need to do to bring it back in good health. It's a little early to judge, but I think that decision needs to be developed at that particular meeting. Bob.

MR. BEAL: The action plan that the commission approved for 2003, the final step for croaker was put together the assessment, have the peer review, and the final step for this year was going to be for the South Atlantic Board to provide advice to staff for development of a PID on the next amendment.

So, as Bill said, the croaker plan as it stands right now, doesn't have compliance criteria and isn't in sync with the rest of the commission plans. The level of changes that plan is going to implement is the question at hand. I think an amendment of some sort needs to be developed for croaker to shore up the interstate management of that species.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Paul.

MR. PIAVIS: Just along those lines, too, just over the last several years, there has been quite a bit more done on life history, and a fisheries management plan is more than the assessment and the management results.

CHAIRMAN COLE: Any other comments? Any other business to come before the board? There being no other business before the board, the board is adjourned.

(Whereupon, the meeting was adjourned at 4:25 o'clock p.m., August 26, 2003.)
