

PROCEEDINGS OF THE
ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION
SCIAENIDS MANAGEMENT BOARD

The Westin Crystal City
Arlington, Virginia
Hybrid Meeting

May 6, 2025

Approved August 5, 2025

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1. **Approval of agenda** by consent (Page 1).
2. **Approval of Proceedings of Tuesday, May 6, 2025** by consent (Page 1).
3. **For the southern stock of red drum, initiate an addendum to modify the FMP to set the management threshold at F30 and the management goal at F40. Require all states to set regulations that would be expected to not exceed F30 for fishing mortality in their state. Direct staff to conduct a new stock assessment for red drum with a terminal year of 2031. When evaluating state regulations' ability to not exceed F30, the Technical Committee shall not consider non-compliance. In the case where states have changed their regulations after the terminal year for F in the 2024 stock assessment, the Technical Committee shall use actual recreational harvest estimates to evaluate F** (Page 12). Motion by Carolyn Belcher; second by Erika Burgess. Motion passes by consent (Page 13).
4. **Move to initiate an addendum to consider changes to the recreational bag limits and slot limits for the northern stock of red drum to address increasing fishing mortality and to update *de minimis* provisions of the FMP** (Page 14). Motion by Chris Batsavage; second by Pat Geer. Motion passes by consent (Page 16).
5. **Move to adjourn** by consent (Page 18).

ATTENDANCE

Board Members

Joe Cimino, NJ (AA)	Rep. Brian Turner, NC (LA)
Jeff Kaelin, NJ (GA)	Ben Dyar, SC, proxy for B. Keppler (AA)
Adam Nowalsky, NJ (LA)	Malcolm Rhodes, SC (GA)
Richard Wong, DE, proxy for J. Clark (AA)	Mel Bell, SC, proxy for Sen. Cromer (LA)
Roy Miller, DE (GA)	Doug Haymans, GA (AA)
Craig Pugh, DE, proxy for Rep. Carson (LA)	Spud Woodward, GA (GA)
Carrie Kennedy, MD, proxy for L. Fegley (AA)	Carolyn Belcher, GA, proxy for Rep. Rhodes (LA)
Robert T. Brown, MD, proxy for R. Dize (GA)	Erika Burgess, FL, proxy for J. McCawley (AA)
David Sikorski, MD, proxy for Del. Stein (LA)	Gary Jennings, FL (GA)
Pat Geer, VA, proxy for J. Green (AA)	Ron Owens, PRFC
James Minor, VA (GA)	Rick DeVictor, NMFS
Chris Batsavage, NC, proxy for K. Rawls (AA)	

(AA = Administrative Appointee; GA = Governor Appointee; LA = Legislative Appointee)

Ex-Officio Members

Ethan Simpson, Red Drum Technical Committee Chair	Tracy Pugh, Red Drum Stk. Assmnt. Subcommittee Chair
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Staff

Bob Beal	Caitlin Starks	Katie Drew
Toni Kerns	James Boyle	Samara Nehemiah
Tina Berger	Emilie Franke	Jainita Patel
Madeline Musante	Chelsea Tuohy	
Tracey Bauer	Jeff Kipp	

The Sciaenids Management Board of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission convened in the Jefferson Ballroom of the Westin Crystal City Hotel, Arlington, Virginia, via hybrid meeting, in-person and webinar; Tuesday, May 6, 2025, and was called to order at 10:45 a.m. by Chair Doug Haymans.

CALL TO ORDER

CHAIR DOUG HAYMANS: Calling the Sciaenids Management Board meeting to order.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

CHAIR HAYMANS: You have the agenda in front of you; is there any additions or changes to the agenda? Seeing none; we'll accept the agenda as presented.

APPROVAL OF PROCEEDINGS

CHAIR HAYMANS: You had the proceedings of the February meeting given to you. Is there any changes or additions to that? Seeing none; we will accept it as presented.

PUBLIC COMMENT

CHAIR HAYMANS: Is there any comment from the public on items not on the agenda? Seeing no hands raised, let's get to the action of the day. Red Drum Technical Committee Report, and that will be Ethan Simpson.

RED DRUM TECHNICAL COMMITTEE REPORT

MR. ETHAN SIMPSON: Yes, good morning members of the Board. For those of you that don't know me, I'm Ethan Simpson, I'm from Virginia. I am the TC Chair. Today, what we would like to get into is an update on the previous TC tasks from the Sciaenids Board, regarding the 2024 Red Drum Stock Assessment. As a refresher, these are the original Board tasks and some additional guidance we sought from the Annual Meeting October of last year.

The original task included in the Board motion was to produce these static spawning potential ratio for a range of slot sizes between 14 and 27 inches, associated with bag limit ranges from 0 to 5 fish per person for both the southern region and/or South Carolina, Georgia, Florida individually. A combination of size limit changes across 13 inches of spread, as well as 6 different bag limits, resulted in thousands of potential regulatory combinations.

Ultimately, we sought some additional guidance from the Board, and it was distilled down to determining the stock-wide catch reduction necessary to achieve a management target of an SPR 40%, as well as the regulatory changes that will achieve those necessary catch reductions. This was in December of '24 that we received that additional tasking. Since then, at the February 2025 winter meeting, it was further refined into two tasks for the TC.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON BENCHMARK STOCK ASSESSMENT FOLLOW-UP TASKS

MR. SIMPSON: Task 1 was to calculate the catch reduction needed for the southern stock to fish at F30%, F35% and F40%, as well as the projected timeline to reach the threshold and target spawning stock biomasses under each F scenario. Those analysis were to not incorporate effort trends, but should include alternate analyses with and without noncompliance assumptions. Task 2 was related to the northern stock, and it was to discuss how to interpret TLA results of "moderate action" as well as methods we could use to estimate regulatory changes to impacts for the northern stock. This is just a timeline of the meetings we've had thus far. I won't get into the details of it necessarily, but since November of 2024, as I've said, this task has been further refined. The TC and Working Groups have met at least six times working on this. At the most recent TC meeting in March, we did look at updates on state-specific catch reduction analyses, essentially making sure that the state TCs were aware of the process and understood how we were going to move forward.

We did discuss the additional F projections at that meeting, and that is what you'll see presented in this presentation, and review the TC Report outline. What I would like to note at this point is that states have not submitted state-specific reduction plans, given the Board guidance to explore different F values. That would be still in the upcoming process.

To get into the southern stock and Task 1, we're looking at how we generate these projections. Essentially, we project stocks forward from the terminal year of the assessment, until equilibrium catches are reached. We then compare the catch at the end of each projection period under status quo, F40%, F35% and F30%, and determined stockwide catch reductions needed to achieve those F values.

I will note here that based on the stock assessment, F40% is the F level associated with SPR 40% and so forth. By definition, F35% and F30% will be unable to achieve SPR targets of 40%. These are just some of the inputs that are going into these projections. What you see here is the recruitment levels expected from the model stock recruitment relationship, given the spawning stock biomass level at the time of spawning, which was used for the projection.

You know these are slightly lower than using the recruitment expected from the SR relationship, given the SSB and projections never reached within half a percent of the spawning stock biomass reference points. The figure in front of you just shows the actual recruitment value used in the projections. It's consistent between the various F levels.

The next component would be fishing mortality. For this we use a reference period of 2019 to 2021, and that is because that is the most recent period which regulations were consistent throughout the same time period. You can see here in that top figure the projected F values from the various projection scenarios.

As you would expect, the F40% projection results in a lower F value overall, and as you decrease from F35% to F30%, the actual realized F values increase proportionately. We did partition F among fleets, based on those fleets within the southern states for that time period. What we'll get back to shortly, is that Florida did have a regulatory change in September in '22, that was not accounted for in the time series used for the stock status determination.

However, that will be further explored in the catch reduction analyses that we'll get to shortly. Because of the long-lived nature of the species, it did require quite a bit of projecting forward to come to an equilibrium status. It is a 40-year projection moving forward, with constant F levels across those projection years. You can see these figures again. The first figure on your left does match up with the previous figure about F levels, what one would expect in terms of total removals. The figure on the right shows the spawning stock biomass approaching those target and threshold values. But don't worry too much about the graph, because here are the numbers, for those that prefer numbers. What you're looking at here are those projections, and under these various rebuilding scenarios, how long it would take to reach threshold and target values. Note that spawning stock biomass, it wasn't included here, but it can be understood that SSB will not hit the threshold or target, and continue to decline under current status quo F.

As you can see here, F30% years to spawning stock threshold will be five years and hitting target of that 40% at 32 years. At this time, I should also note that the TC is recommending the 40% target with the recent literature hinting that they may indeed need to be higher than that to maintain a stable population.

With that said, we can get into the tasks as they were directed to the TC. Task 1 was to calculate the catch reduction needed for the southern stock to fish at F30%, F35%, and F40%, as well as the projected timeline to reach the threshold and target SSBs under each F scenario. These analyses should not incorporate effort trends, and should include

alternate analyses with and without noncompliance assumption.

The way we actually get at these catch reductions is we look at specific changes that can occur within a regulation. These include for the bag, vessel and size limit changes. The addition of vessel limits was not part of the original motion. However, Florida has already changed vessel limits following the assessment, and other states have expressed interest in considering these.

We do consider vessel limits as a viable way to get at some of these reductions. We do account for dead discards, shifting from harvest to release in these calculations, as well as we've adjusted catch. The adjusted catch has been compared to the status quo catch, which determines the reduction in dead catch, which is a combination of harvest and dead discards.

The values we're using here is we're using MRIP data from 2018 to 2021 as status quo catch. Again, this is the period in which there was consistent management across states, and as instructed, this did not incorporate changing effort trends. Analyses do account for additional documented mortality, and that is based on observed rates from MRIP, and that includes noncompliance and observed dead discards.

The TC during those meetings has reviewed and approved these methods and tools, and we have applied them to the Florida's regulatory changes as an example of what this would look like moving forward, and we will get to that shortly. But before we do look at Florida as an example of catch reduction analysis.

We did want to mention that the TC did hear concerns about dead discards when calculating the noncompliance values. Ultimately, as the tables in front of you indicate, dead discards within that noncompliance realm, essentially are a nonissue, very, very small numbers that wouldn't have any real impact on the modeling.

But that said, to go on to Florida. With the regulatory changes in 2022, you can use Florida as an example to show that catch reduction at a state-specific level. Here you can see that at that state-specific level Florida has already achieved a 16.8% reduction when this is calculated. But when this is calculated alongside these 0% reductions from South Carolina and Georgia at a stockwide level, it results in an overall reduction of 9.3% to that southern stock. The second one, the first table you saw did not incorporate noncompliance as a factor. This table does represent noncompliance.

You can see here that it is expressed, due to the iterations that are used to calculate that, it is expressed with both minimum and maximum values, minimum representing the highest rates of noncompliance in those random iterations, and then the maximum representing the least amount of noncompliance, so it is a bit contradictory.

However, in this scenario, Florida would have achieved as a mean, would have achieved 14.9% reduction at that state level. Whereas, at a stockwide level, again with factoring in these 0% percent reductions from Georgia and South Carolina, it amounts to an 8.3% reduction at a southern stockwide level.

While the Board digests that, I am happy to return to you when it gets into it. I would like to move on Task 2, which is those northern stock considerations. As a reminder, Task 2 was to discuss how one would interpret the TLA results of moderate action, and discuss the methods for estimating regulatory changes impacts on the northern stock.

To remind the Board, the TLA did establish in the most recent stock assessment that the northern stock is neither experiencing overfishing nor is the stock overfished. However, overfishing is defined in this scenario as by fishery performance using the TLA. The threshold for overfishing is a red indicator in any one of the last three terminal years of the TLA.

The TLA has shown yellow indicators for all three of the previous three years, suggesting again, moderate action from the Board. While the stock assessment did not describe interpretation of this moderate action determination, something to consider is the fishery performance has been showing increasing proportions of red in its annual metrics since the mid-2000s.

Specifically, six of the seven previous years that have available data have shown some proportion of red. That would be the period of 2016 to 2022. While only one year from the period of 2003 to 2015 showed any red, with three of those years actually being green. This trend does point to increasing fishing effort across the northern stock, which consistently approaches those threshold values.

Similarly, overfished, which was not triggered in this assessment, it is defined by adult abundance, and it is only triggered when the tabular metric, that is the long-term metric is red in one of the three previous years, again, which did not occur. However, adult abundance has been trending toward yellow and red designations in the recent year's annual metrics, those are the metrics determined for a single year.

The period of 2019 to 2022 showed two years in yellow and a red year in the terminal year of 2022. Again, this contrasts with previous periods, specifically the period of 2012 to 2018, in which six of the years were green and only one in yellow, so again that trend is towards larger proportions of yellow and red designations in the most recent years. To get at the idea of moderate action, the TC did work to establish some guidelines that could be used in what we feel would constitute moderate action at this stage for the northern stock. Those include continuing to monitor fishery performance, adult abundance and recruitment trends in the TLA. It is not relaxing any existing management measures for the northern stock.

Completing a between assessment update for the TLA for both stocks. I will pause there briefly and say that an update between assessments could not trigger a new overfishing determination, considering the terminal years of the assessment report and the seven-year time period it takes to trigger those tabular metrics.

It wouldn't trigger an overfishing determination. However, it would benefit management in understanding how things are trending between assessments. Finally, developing abundance indices from the northern edge of the stock, particularly Virginia northward, would greatly benefit future management efforts for the northern stock.

To get at estimating regulatory changes and how that would impact F values for the northern stock, we would begin by using the same bag, vessel and slot size catch reduction methods as outlined within the southern stock. None were completed at this stage, which was consistent with the TCs recommendation that there were no specific regulatory changes were necessary at this time.

An important thing to note here is that if we go this route of trying to quantitatively determine catch reduction needed for the northern stock, it will require the identification of a new quantitative method to get at that, because the TLA is fundamentally a qualitative tool. There would probably be an iterative process to determine how to actually approach those quantitative changes to the northern stock.

From here, just to refresh us on what would be the upcoming tasks potentially. Southern stock TC members are still working and can continue to work on getting their catch reduction analyses together. As a TC, we would all determine, you know look at those proposed regulatory changes and see if they meet the reduction goals. The TC will meet again to review proposed regulations and review any potential methodology to address, like in that quantitative approach, the northern stock.

Finally, have a report ready for the Board either at the next meeting or the annual meeting on those

tasks, depending on the complexity of what is in front of us. With that I am happy to take any questions. Joey Ballenger is here as well as a representative of the SAS Chair, that hopefully we can get at any of your specific questions between us.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Thank you very much. I know that there are southern questions, but I'm going to look just a moment to the northern stock to see if there are any questions for Ethan on the TLA, or anything that was proposed there. Chris.

MR. CHRIS BATSAVAGE: Ethan, when the TC discussed the moderate action for the northern population, was there any discussion about the increased harvest in effort of red drum in that northern area, since the terminal year of the stock assessment?

MR. SIMPSON: It has been noted by TC members that we are observing that increased catch. Whether that is a northward range expansion or change in recruitment patterns in the north, it has been observed. I think it potentially prompts an approach to acknowledge that there is going to be continued increased catch in that northern, mostly due to availability of the fish.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Any other questions on the northern stock? Yes, I'm sorry, Rich.

MR. RICH WONG: Yes, Rich Wong, Delaware, thank you, Mr. Chair. Could you elaborate a little bit more on that increasing effort that you're seeing? What are we looking at in the past two years?

MR. SIMPSON: Unfortunately, I don't have any figures in front of me. I do know that anecdotally, especially in Virginia that there is an abundance of slot size fish that are easily exploitable.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Okay, seeing no other hands. All right, let's move to the southern stock, and

do you guys have an order on which you want to be in? Erika.

MS. ERIKA BURGESS: I have questions for the TC. The first one would be, was an iterative process used to develop, like the one used by the Southeast Fishery Science Center and FWC in our SEDAR assessments, to set fleet specific Fs when you did the projections for constant fishing rate scenarios? It might be a question for Jeff.

MR. JEFF J. KIPP: It was not an iterative approach applied in the projections to get at the catch reductions needed for the F levels requested by the Board, and I may have missed the second part is more about the fleet specific Fs.

MS. BURGESS: It might be the same answer. Do you think there would be a benefit, or would it change the outcome if you used an iterative approach?

MR. KIPP: No, not to answer the question of the catch reduction needed, because what we're doing is we're taking a ratio of two projections, one with the status quo F at the end of the assessment, and one with the F that is desired by the Board, whatever that F percent might be. We're just comparing the catches under those two scenarios.

The Fs are the only things that changes in those two projections, everything else is held constant to understand how that would change the expected catch under those two F levels, and so an iterative approach doesn't offer any benefits over just doing the single calculation from a single projection for each of those.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Questions or comments? Go Erika.

MS. BURGESS: Would it be possible to get confidence intervals around the estimates for the impacts of the catch reductions?

MR. KIPP: Impacts of the catch reductions to the projected spawning stock biomass?

MS. BURGESS: One thing that we're missing throughout a lot of the stuff that we got through the TC is understanding the confidence intervals around them. We're given the information as if everything is a point estimate with no uncertainty around it. I would like to see the uncertainty end in products that are generated by the TC, so we can understand how precise, how accurate the estimates are that are being generated.

We're looking at some big changes and I'm going to lay out in a little bit how I think we really don't understand the magnitude of change needed. No one at this Board can really assess risk and uncertainty without some confidence levels.

MR. KIPP: Going back to the original purpose of the tasks that we got from the Board was to understand the catch reductions. The way that made sense about going about addressing that task was to look at sort of a long-term equilibrium scenario. What are we expecting, in terms of catch reductions under different F levels in a long-term equilibrium situation?

That is how we approached the projections. I think that the questions maybe your effort in terms of risk and uncertainty, which we thought was not really a key aspect that the Board was after here, is probably a little bit in difference in the way we do these projections. If we are trying to provide confidence intervals on things like spawning stock biomass under a F change.

Then that makes more sense to iterate that process and provide probabilities and distributions around those. That is what we tried to get at in our comments in the memo that went to the Board was, in next steps, if we have objectives from the Board as to what is desired in risk and uncertainty information, we can then modify the projection approach to provide that information.

For example, one that comes to mind is, if the Board was interested in the probability of

rebuilding the stock in a certain specified timeframe. We could then provide the F estimates that would be projected to get you to that goal, and a distribution around that so you could understand a 50% probability of hitting that goal versus a 25th percent probability of that.

I think there are kind of two different questions, and the main focus coming into this was catch reductions. There again, it goes back to, there is not really a benefit from an iterative approach to answer the questions on the catch reductions. But certainly, if there was a desire for risk and uncertainty information on projections into the future on things like spawning stock biomass, that is something that we could do with an iterative approach on the projections.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Additional questions, comments? Carolyn.

MS. CAROLYN N. BELCHER: Just out of curiosity, was there discussion with the TC about the bias relative to the FES effort estimates and how that could potentially be affecting these projections, if we find out that the biases will be 40%, and what that does for the projection on the catch? Was any of that discussed?

MR. SIMPSON: To my knowledge, no. That was not a consideration, and correct me if I'm wrong, Jeff or Joey, but no. We did not take that approach at that time.

JOEY BALLENGER: I will just speak to, that was a point of consideration during the stock assessment process itself. There is a sensitivity analysis about the potential impact of FES changes coming up in 2026, based off of guidance we received from MRIP at the time. That was anticipated to affect effort and be a constant effort shift across the entire time series, which would be interpreted as a constant shift in the catch across the time series.

In the assessment that does affect the scale of the population. It did not affect the stock status or terminal year stock status, or SPR estimates, et cetera. I think the same thing would hold true

moving forward with the projections and the process that we have here, because it didn't really affect the Fs, it doesn't affect the F scale at all.

CHAIR HAYMANS: I'll just say that in some of those estimates of effort, the PSEs ranged as high as 90% for the state of Georgia. None of them were satisfactory for use. Additional questions from the far end, comments? Yes, Rich.

MR. WONG: I have a question for TC Chair. How comparable are the catch reductions for Florida between Table 6 and Table 7, because you are using a different denominator here, you are using two different methods to calculate those reductions? One is using observed MRIP landings for the previous three years, and the other is using the projected landings from different Fs. My question is, how comparable are those two reductions?

MR. SIMPSON: If you were referencing the 21.6 reduction, that the Florida stock assessment put forward, that was essentially calculated based on two years of MRIP data, as opposed to the proceeding number of years. At this time, it has not been fully vetted by the TC.

MR. WONG: I'm referring to Table 6 and Table 7 from the report, from the memo.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Erika, to that point?

MS. BURGESS: Yes, just an important point of clarification. The TC Chair referenced the Florida stock assessment. That is not where these numbers are coming from. These are the numbers observed in MRIP. Instead of using the projected catch rate that came out of the assessment, we looked at what MRIP produced with our new regulations in place, which is 0 retention of fish for the entire Indian River Lagoon.

A reduction in our bag limit for the most northern four and a half counties from 2 fish to

1 fish per person, and a vessel limit reduction from 8 fish to 4 fish. Rather than just seeing what the model would come up with and let's see what this tool generates, we looked at what is MRIP actually observing? That's how we received that 21.

MR. WONG: Right, that is how I interpreted the analysis, but what I'm saying is there are two different denominators here. I don't know which reductions they are going to use from this analysis.

MR. SIMPSON: Sure, I apologize. I think there was a misunderstanding about what you were referencing. Yes, so the first table only represents the higher number, the 16-point number. That represents not incorporating noncompliance as a factor. Whereas, the second does incorporate noncompliance as a factor going into these. That would be at the Board's discretion of what approach they would prefer. I believe striped bass historically has used noncompliance as a factor, but cobia has not, so they are precedence in both directions.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Erika.

MS. BURGESS: In the look at the noncompliance analysis for Florida, there was 1 fish that was observed that was 14 inches that generated an estimated total, taking that thing of 200,000 fish. For me that math isn't "mathing" with reality. Then as a perspective from our state, we would prefer to address compliance through enforcement and education rather than assume what noncompliance is going to be through a modeling exercise to set regulations.

MR. SIMPSON: Absolutely, that is at the Board's discretion of what they would prefer to do there.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Others? Silence is deafening. Erika.

MS. BURGESS: I'm ready to move on from questions if you are, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Sure.

MS. BURGESS: I'm going to be speaking to the southern stock only. We are faced with discussions about uncertainty here, and that is not uncommon for managers at this table. The assessments that have been used to try and evaluate the status of the red drum stock have been plagued with challenges, because of a lack of robust data resources that most stock assessment models demand to develop reliable estimates of SSB.

We only have one fishery independent survey that is trying to generate an estimate of the adult spawning stock, and that is the index that is used in this model. But that index, as we've discussed before is geographically very constricted in scope, and we have no indication to say that that index is or is not representative of the entire adult spawning stock.

Our fisheries dependent data comes from MRIP, and I'm not going to belabor the issues associated with that program and that dataset. However, as releases continue to outpace actual harvest in this fishery, MRIP is just going to become more and more problematic for management, and create more and more uncertainty in our models.

I'm not disputing that the stock isn't in the best shape, but the uncertainty that is inherent in the model with the data inputs, the assumptions that go into it, and the outputs mean that we can't treat this as something that is cut and dry. This is further complicated by the fact that we have also used an SF model in Florida to evaluate our stock in our fishery, and it's produced conflicting results with the regional assessment.

Our assessment was completed in 2020 with data through 2019, so with the concession of the Chairman, take some time to review some of the unresolved uncertainties with the current coastal southern stock model, and provide information about Florida's assessment, and hopefully make the case that our management response be one that is fully accepting of the

uncertainty that we're faced with, and one that prudently applies a reasonable management response.

The CIE reviewers who reviewed the southern stock assessment, recommended the assessment explore the effects of uncertainty on the data inputs, model outputs, and how those impact management regulations or recommendations. In that assessment process, additional characterization of the model uncertainty was explored.

However, the initial results of the analysis suggested some model instability. Unfortunately, the Stock Assessment Subcommittee ran out of time to fully explore and identify what the underlying driver was. Some uncertainty analyses were performed adequately, such as the sensitivity runs for likelihood profiling, and the retrospective analysis.

The base model sensitivity run showed high sensitivity to spawning stock biomass at the end SPR outputs, but changes of the inputs. For example, changing the recreational fleet selectivity resulted in four times increase in SSB. If we use a different start year, we started the model in 1989, which is when the commercial fishery was partially closed.

That start year as we used in the past, it would have estimated a less depleted stock and a different stock status from the base model. The model is also sensitive to configurations of fishing mortality, which was not explored in the assessment or at the review. For example, using an F configuration that fits the landings exactly, results in a completely different stock status determination for both SSB and F.

That kind of sums up a lot, it's not an exhaustive list of the uncertainty associated with the regional assessment, but it gives some concrete examples. In Florida we don't use SSB or SPR to manage our stocks, because we don't have any confidence in those parameters that are estimated by our model.

Instead, we use escapement, and we use an escapement rate of 40% as our management target. We've been able to use that to successfully manage our stock for the last 30 years. We assess our coast in two regions, we have a northeast region and a southeast region, and the southeast accounts for two-thirds of our coastline.

Our 2020 assessment indicated that red fish were exceeding the escapement target in the northeast and were just below it in the southeast. That result in our assessment led us to ultimately close that area to fishing. We believe that that was driven not by spawning stock biomass changes, but by habitat changes in the Indian River Lagoon, which have been publicized nationally.

You know we've lost a lot of seagrasses, multiple water quality issues, et cetera. The model we produced developed estimates of F, SPR and SSB. However, we have very low confidence in those SPR and SSB models. Therefore, we choose F and upon an escapement to monitor and evaluate our fishery. We presented all the information from our assessment to our commissioners, and they chose a more conservative approach than what staff recommended to manage this fishery. They closed it, as I said, they cut out northeast and the southeast. They cut our bag limit and vessel limit in half in the northeast. Our commissioners took into account not just the stock assessment, they considered those habitat changes and they made what we consider a very prudent decision.

These regulations have been in place since 2022. We've redone stakeholder satisfaction surveys; we've conducted a series of focus groups. We look at our abundance indices and how it's had assessments on annual basis, and we're receiving positive results and observations that we're achieving our intended outcomes from those changes in 2022. Coming back to ASMFC today and the deliberations before us.

The TC has projected a southern stock regional assessment model into the future to estimate catch reductions needed to meet a suite of Fs and produce a range of SPRs. But because there is a lot of uncertainty around the SSB for the southern stock, we don't think that the graph showing what FSPR is reaching has an appropriate way to relay all the uncertainty that is going into this model, and instead that we recommend several projections to be conducted to provide more information about risk and uncertainty around the catch projection estimates.

I bring this before the Board, because we need to understand how uncertainty in this model results in uncertainty that is projected forward into the projections out of the model. We have a wide range of SSBs generated by the Florida assessment, the regional assessment and going back to SEDAR 44, where there are magnitudes of difference in what SSB has been estimated for the stock.

We have estimates of SSB ranging from 8,700 metric tons coming out of this assessment. Florida's assessment produces an estimate just for our state of 45,000 metric tons, and SEDAR 44 estimated 98,000 metric tons. There have been wide swings all over the place. As I said near the start, with all this uncertainty, things are not cut and dry.

The southern stock assessment, I think should be used to inform the trajectory of management decisions, but not set an alternate value of where we should try to go. Florida has already made major changes and strides to reduce F and address F in our fishery, and we look forward to supporting our fellow southern states as they proceed to more changes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Thank you for those well thought out comments. Any others regarding the southern stock? Yes, Ethan.

MR. SIMPSON: Yes, if there are no other comments. The only point I would like to make from Erika's comment is that the regional assessment was independently peer reviewed,

while the Florida's was not. The TC would recommend, if the approach is to incorporate some of those values, bringing that stock assessment to the TC and the SAS for further evaluation, and hopefully finding a way for these things to live together.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Carol.

MS. BELCHER: Yes, I appreciate the comments from the TC on that, but I do think the management side makes it difficult to reconcile, right? Because when you think about when we go to our Board, commissioners, there is a lot of times that we get asked on the front end, what is the state data telling us?

I think this is one of those things, and this is probably one of the few times, I think in the time I've worked with stock assessments, that we've actually been able to say the state can put up a state-specific assessment against a regional assessment. Georgia doesn't have the benefit of data to do a stand-alone assessment.

For us we are looking to the regional, but you have the South Carolina that can do a standalone, which is a very similar model. Florida does the exact same thing. I think that there still needs to be a little bit of discussion. For lack of a better word, the respect to the fact the states are doing this. You know again, annually, biannually, whatever.

Just because there is not an independent review, doesn't necessarily mean that it's not as good an assessment. I think the benefits to doing a state-specific assessment is it's geared towards your fishery. You know your fishery; you know your habitat. Florida's habitat is obviously very different than Georgia's, which is still somewhat similar to South Carolina's but different.

There are things in those models that are very much driven by the fishery, the environment, and those assumptions are going to be different from one another. I am a little bit concerned

that there is going to be this potential for competing between regional versus a state, and how a state is going to have to broach addressing where we are with the Commission, and the Commission's needs under how we work the Compact.

I think that is the one thing that makes me a little bit twitchy is the fact that it is again back to the state and end up basically backing away, because a regional assessment has been done and it's been peer reviewed. I would argue the science is good on both sides of that, because a lot of the people who are doing the state assessments are also the people on your Stock Assessment Subcommittee.

MR. SIMPSON: Yes, absolutely, and my point wasn't to create any sort of riff. I agree with many of your points there. I don't want to see competing stock assessments. It is more a comment on the TC is available and the SAS is available, and working together we can generate something that should be able to work for everyone.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Yes, Joey.

MR. BALLENGER: Just to add to that. I completely acknowledge that states and the region are doing different things. We're talking a lot about a Florida assessment; we're talking a lot about the regional stock assessment. I think it would behoove, potentially the Board, to have the TC potentially investigate the structural differences between the models, and what may be leading to some of the differences in outcomes between those two assessment approaches. That is something that has not necessarily been fully evaluated at any form at this point in time, and that may help clarify some of this discretion about differences in F scale, escapement rates et cetera, to understand what are some of the differences, because they are both Statistical Catch at Age Models, but there are some different assumptions made, from my understanding, between the two modeling approaches. There can be justification one way or the other, but at least understanding what the differences are may be prudent.

CHAIR HAYMANS: I was going to ask Jeff if he maybe could add a little bit of a Commission perspective on that.

MR. KIPP: Yes, I mean I think the Commission's perspective might be the same here is that the Technical Committee has not had a chance to evaluate the Florida assessment, and we're hearing some differences between the state-specific Florida assessment and the regional assessment that would be beneficial to dig into and determine what might be going on there.

Because it creates some confusion if we have two different assessments that are in front of management. Yes, I would say that it would be a good endeavor for the TC to evaluate that assessment as well, and then come back to the Board with some thoughts from that evaluation.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Thank you, Jeff, so Ben.

MR. BEN DYAR: A couple points. Certainly, don't want to dismiss, or it's not any intent to dismiss any efforts that Florida has already made. I commend them for doing that on their own and seeing those and following through. You know no inherent issues really with noncompliance.

But there are some concerns regarding one intercept, when it talks about accounting for 32 percent of the annual catch. That definitely raises eyebrows, and it just so happened to be within the noncompliance realm. That said, I'll speak to the point you just made recently in a second, but still there are reservations when trying to determine.

I mean this is an exercise in risk analysis that is our main job, right? When looking at different Fs, there are reservations in trying to determine what that best option is. I feel unequipped at this point trying to determine that risk analysis. I know there is an MO done in '16 and a Terms of Reference as well with the recent assessment.

But still before us is that task of looking at these different reference points and getting back to that kind of confidence interval. I'm still not clear on exactly how, what are the options that the Board might have to be able to task the TC with getting at some of those potential estimates, and better understanding where our risks lie in these different kind of F thresholds.

If that is an option, I don't know. Then also, I would kind of also look to Florida and our southern states to look at their comfort level regarding the most recent point, and the TC looking at their assessment, and trying to see where those two can maybe live together.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Anybody to his point? No. Chris.

MR. BATSAVAGE: Interesting conversations about different assessments level of uncertainty, what level of use the coastwide assessment should be applied for management. These are all the great topics we should have discussed maybe back on the table when we approved this coastwide stock assessment for management use.

I apologize for my cynicism, but seems a lot of this came up, and all of a sudden, we see it's a 20% reduction needed to rebuild the stock, which at least in the Mid-Atlantic around 20% is well in the range of reductions we often face when we're in an overfishing situation or overfished. I'm just really confused, as far as where the southern states are hoping to go with this.

It seems pretty clear that you have an overfished, overfishing situation. Yes, there is uncertainty with the assessment results, much like other stock assessments that are put before us that we approved for management. Yes, I mean, I guess I'll maybe look for a motion from the southern states, as far as what you want to do about addressing a pretty clear problem for your stock, and then see where you go from there.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Carolyn.

MS. BELCHER: Mr. Chair, I'm willing to put a motion forward to the group.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Okay, and I believe staff has it. Go ahead and read it.

MS. BELCHER: Reading it into the record. I would like to **make the motion that for the southern stock of red drum we initiate an addendum to modify the FMP to set the management threshold at F30 and the management goal at F40. Require all states to set regulations that would be expected to exceed F30 for fishing mortality in their state.**

Direct staff to conduct a new stock assessment for red drum with a terminal year of 2031. When evaluating state regulations' ability to exceed the F30, the Technical Committee shall not consider non-compliance. In the case where states have changed their regulations after the terminal year for F in the 2024 stock assessment, the Technical Committee shall use actual recreational harvest estimates to evaluate F.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Thank you for that well-constructed and thought-out motion. I see a second from Erika. Okay, additional comments on that? Erika.

MS. BURGESS: Yes, so it seems to me that some of my comments were misconstrued, so I would like to provide additional clarity. My purpose for bringing up the Florida assessment was really to discuss and bring to light just the overall uncertainty that we face in assessing red drum in the southeast.

As you can see by the motion here, there is no statement that we would use Florida's assessment to determine the regulations that would go forward into the next amendment. With regards to the discussion in October, I thought I made it very clear that I questioned the assessment. Dr. Ballenger and I had an exchange that we talked about how the greatest uncertainty in this assessment is SSB.

We're looking at management metrics that are based foundationally upon SSB. I feel like this is a reasonable approach. We have a better understanding of F. We are fishing on subadults in this fishery, and I think that this might be a better direction for prudently accounting for the unknowns and uncertainties.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Anyone else? Chris.

MR. BATSAVAGE: Appreciate the motion up on the board here to consider. It largely makes sense. I do have concerns about not accounting for noncompliance, although I do agree the one-point estimate for Florida is problematic, where one 14-inch drum can project that to a lot of fish. But we know that noncompliance happens, no matter how much effort you put into law enforcement and outreach. I'm not sure if I'll support it, because I think noncompliance is definitely an issue that shouldn't be ignored. But I'm still thinking that one over.

CHAIR HAYMANS: I would suggest that it is not being ignored and we are looking at it closely, but just not considering it for this particular Addendum. I would ask Tracey to give us a quick look at what it might mean for the timing of the next addendum.

MS. TRACEY BAUER: For an addendum if it was an expedited type timeline, if the Board does initiate an addendum at this meeting, they would approve the addendum for public comment at the summer meeting this year, and the annual meeting the Sciaenids Board would review public comment and take final action.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Possibly by the annual meeting, if I make it that month. Any other comments or questions on the motion that is on the table? Okay, does anyone need time to caucus? Okay two minutes, three minutes. We'll give three minutes to caucus. I hear the chime, does anyone else need time? I see Joe's hand.

MR. JOE CIMINO: I have a question. I think we needed some clarification on the very last line on harvest estimates would mean that we're not

including discard mortality, is that correct? Is that part of this motion?

CHAIR HAYMANS: Erika.

MS. BURGESS: This includes discard mortality. The tool that the TC developed and I look to Jeff so I'm not speaking for Jeff or the TC. Can you explain what is considered in the info.

MR. KIPP: Yes, so this would include discards in that accounting as well. That's a good catch there. This additional methodology would include discards from Florida, the one that is noted here in the motion. I think that could be changed to recreational dead fish or dead catch to clarify.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Roy.

MR. ROY W. MILLER: Mr. Chair, this issue has come up before. Is it appropriate for states like Delaware and New Jersey to even be voting on this particular motion? I would like some clarification on that. I know we haven't totally resolved that issue at the Policy Board level. How do you see it applying in this particular case?

CHAIR HAYMANS: Good question, Roy, very good, thank you. Yes, it would have been nice if we had had the second half of our ISFMP Board talk about this first. My hope is that southern states would vote on the southern stock, that the northern states would vote on the northern stock, as a case example, and maybe we could use that for tomorrow. I'm very happy that we've had discussion across both stocks, because I think that is very informative. But my hope is that we can stick to our regional stocks in voting. I'm going to ask Bob, maybe to address that.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ROBERT E. BEAL: Yes, the practice has been, up until now, which is being discussed is for all the states that are members of the Sciaenids Management Board can vote on any motion. But if folks around the Board

want to abstain from this, because they feel it's a southern issue primarily, then that is up to them and that is completely in bounds.

You don't have to vote on this if you feel this is a southern issue. But there is going to be considerable discussion on this tomorrow, the Executive Committee as well as at the Policy Board on Thursday. It is a little bit in flux, and in hindsight if this was flipped that would have been better. But this is where we are. It's really up to the states.

If you feel this is primarily a southern issue and they need to work it out among the three states that are affected by this motion, then let them handle that and you can stay out of it. It's up to you. I know it's not much of an answer, but that is kind of where we are.

CHAIR HAYMANS: I would only add to that from my personal feeling that when it becomes precedent setting for other management boards or for other species, and I'll bring this up tomorrow that I think it's very appropriate for us to vote on. But where it's not precedent setting, and specific to a stock, I think you ought to be left to that stock. But again, that is what I think.

We have had time to caucus, and so I would call the vote. We've read it into the record, I don't think we need anymore. **All those in favor, raise your hand. I see 7 in favor, 8 in favor. Thank you, all opposed. Wow, I see 2 opposed, any abstentions, any null votes? Oh, 1 abstention, I missed that one, I apologize. Online, thank you online, and any nulls. Seeing none, I see 8 to 2 to 1 to 0, so that motion passes.**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BEAL: Just a couple of questions. You know ultimately, we'll need to set up a PDT and we'll call for nominations for a Plan Development Team. I think they will need some guidance from the Board, and it doesn't necessarily have to happen today, but somewhere along the way. How do you want them to look at the different stock assessments and compare the two?

I think the term that has been used, how do we get them to live together, you know as this moves forward? I think there will be some more guidance for the PDT, well that would be really helpful. Then the other question, maybe it's just in my mind is that, assuming things go forward on the schedule Tracey mentioned, where we have a draft at the summer meeting, and take potential final action at the annual meeting. Is the action at the annual meeting going to be to select actual management measures, or is it going to be just to establish kind of the process that the southern states are going to use to set up their regulations? In other words, you would set a process in October, then the southern states go home and develop their regs and bring them back to the Board for approval then ultimately implement them. I don't know if we need answers now, and I'm not steering it in any direction. I just think the Plan Development Team will need some guidance on that as they move forward to draft a document.

CHAIR HAYMANS: I don't think that this motion necessarily requires the TC or the Plan Development Team to look at the different assessments. Do I see disagreement on that end? Toni.

MS. TONI KERNS: Typically, when we put together an FMP though, we say that you're going to manage to this F, and then you are working off of the stock assessment to that F. If you want to use something else that is not the stock assessment, then we would need to understand how to do that. If it is something other than that, it would need to go into the Addendum, so that that process is established to do so.

CHAIR HAYMANS: That is part of direction to staff then is to use both Florida and should I throw in South Carolina's as well, against the regionals? Yes, Erika and then Carolyn.

MS. BURGESS: In my mind this is for overarching way the Addendum moves forward,

and I have some things I would like the PDT to consider. But I don't think that the Board needs to decide on them at this time. They need to see it fleshed out by the PDT, so they can evaluate what that might mean.

I have heard that there might be a similar motion to initiate an addendum for the northern stock. I don't know if it is better to let that motion go forward, and then we talk about things we would like to see in the document when it comes before the Board again. But I will defer to the Board Chair for direction on that.

CHAIR HAYMANS: I had Carolyn second, I'm going to ask, do you have something to add to that, Carolyn? No, okay. Is there a motion from the northern stock?

MR. BATSAVAGE: Yes, it looks like it is up on the screen. **Move to initiate an addendum to consider changes to the recreational bag limits and slot limits for the northern stock of red drum to address increasing fishing mortality and to update de minimis provisions of the FMP.** If I get a second, I will provide some justification as to why.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Second by Pat Geer. Go ahead, Chris.

MR. BATSAVAGE: Yes, as was discussed earlier, recreational harvest has increased in the northern population, but particularly north of North Carolina since the terminal year of the stock assessment. Anecdotal reports suggest that there is more effort targeting red drum there, especially as striped bass abundance has decreased. This also includes effort in the harvest during Wave 1, which isn't covered by MRIP north of North Carolina. The 2025 Mid-Atlantic State of the Ecosystem Report done by NOAA's Northeast Fisheries Science Center also noted the increased presence of red drum in the Chesapeake Bay in 2024. Slot limits among the northern population states and jurisdictions are variable, and the bag limits range from 1 to 5 fish per person. It makes sense considering lower bag limits and to review the current slot limits before

effort increases more, potentially leading to an overfishing and/or overfished stock.

The current stock rebuilding projections for the southern population, as well as Louisiana's red drum population says it takes decades to rebuild overfished stocks of red drum, due to their long-lived nature. I think it is a great opportunity to practically address this before we have documented stock concerns for the northern population.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Anybody else to speak to this motion? Pat, as the seconder.

MR. PAT GEER: Just that what Chris said, in Virginia we're seeing an increased abundance of red drum. I would be so bold that it has probably replaced striped bass as one of the staple fish in the Chesapeake Bay, at least in Virginia. We're seeing multiple cohorts from juveniles to slot sizes to bull reds. I have a big concern. I talked to Spud about this, about the concern.

Release mortality on the large red drum. We see that a lot. We see the photographs all the time with five, six red drum on a boat, and these are all over the slot. Those are concerns as well, the mortality on the large bulls that are being caught.

CHAIR HAYMANS: The reds are just following the shrimp up the coast, right?

MR. GEER: Yes, I better not move again. I'm going to move to Alaska next, so really mess things up.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Dave.

MR. DAVID SIKORSKI: To follow up on a Chesapeake perspective. One thing, I support this. I think it's a good idea to take a look at what is going on out there and consider different regulations and consistency especially. In the Chesapeake, I was standing on the banks

of the Potomac, down in St. Mary's County, not far from Robert T. yesterday.

I was talking to somebody, and I said you know, wait. If I fish inside the creek, it's my own waters, outside the creek it's Potomac River Fisheries Commission, the other side of the Potomac in a Virginia creek is Virginia regs. Is my bag limit 1, 3, or 5? We've got a predicament in the Chesapeake. I think we can consider as managers to work through in this Addendum, and I support it for that reason.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Roy.

MR. MILLER: Again, I think that Delaware doesn't really have a big stake in this, and I suspect our colleagues in New Jersey don't either. However, if it's important to North Carolina and to Virginia, we're willing to vote yes to support you. But it's just what we were talking about before, with regard to us voting on the southern motion. I just wanted to put that out there. If you see our vote is a yes, now you know why. We're supporting our neighbors, rather than we feel it's highly important to us.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Carrie.

MS. CARRIE KENNEDY: Thank you; Carrie Kennedy from Maryland DNR. I don't necessarily oppose this motion. However, I am curious what we're actually asking the TC or the Stock Assessment Subcommittee to do. The recommendation from those committees to the Board was to use the similar methods as to those that might be used, before this last motion, to the southern stock.

But they recognized that if we wanted to associate reductions with a specified F scenario, then the new methods would have to be created. Before I feel like I can make a decision, I would really like to understand what we're asking, because given the determination that moderate activity is recommended.

Given where we are in resources, and managing state and ASMFC resources. I don't want to task folks to recreate the wheel, when I consider all the

other management actions for all the other species, and you know NOAA staffing levels. I'm curious what approach is being considered by North Carolina.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Go ahead, Chris.

MR. BATSAVAGE: Thank you for that, Carrie. Maybe I'm oversimplifying my thought behind the Addendum, I hope not. But I don't think calculated reductions to the northern population is necessary for this action. My intention of putting this forward is to put reasonable sideboards on the slot limits and bag limits, and to keep the harvest of subadult fish from increasing too much if effort and availability continues to increase.

I don't see a heavy lift by the TC having to estimate potential reductions. Really, I think this is more for the PDT to develop a suite of options for different slot limits and bag limits, yes to cover this issue. Certainly, don't want to add more analytical work, when you kind of consider all the other work that a lot of these TC members do for other species. Yes, that is kind of my thought process on this.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Just to settle one thing that we talked about up here. Although this is two motions, each asking for an addendum, it's going to be one addendum that contains both the southern stock and the northern stock, just so we're all clear. Ritch.

MR. WONG: I would echo what Mr. Miller said. We do want to support our southern neighbors, Maryland included, Virginia and North Carolina. In principle, I don't typically agree with taking preemptive cuts when the stock status is not overfished and we're not seeing overfishing. The TC provided, I think spot on, moderate action recommendations. Again, it's tough for Delaware too, to navigate the TC recommendations that were supporting our southern neighbors. But anyway, those are just my thoughts, thanks.

CHAIR HAYMANS: We're getting long in the tooth and lunch is ready. Ben.

MR. DYAR: We were talking about schedules. Just to confirm, this is not going to change any of the schedules proposed for the Addendum and getting it approved and through for the southern states, is that correct?

CHAIR HAYMANS: I'll say that the timeline that Tracey laid out is best case scenario. We might not get to annual meeting, but they know the urgency of this, the TC, so we're good. I'm assuming no need to caucus. I am going to call the question to the motion. All those in favor, raise your hand. I see 3.

All those opposed, none. Abstentions, I see. Want me to start again? Abstentions, raise your hands. I see 3 abstentions, and null votes, no nulls. The motion. Okay, so we haven't finalized the vote yet. I'll ask this, is there any need for anybody else to caucus at all? Okay, two minutes to caucus. Ben, you have a question?

MR. DYAR: Did I hear that right; you all are considering putting this all in together as one Addendum?

CHAIR HAYMANS: Yes.

MR. DYAR: Just to clarify that, do we have the ability to, if that starts to bog things down for considerations of one topic versus the other. Do we have the ability to split those apart at a later date?

CHAIR HAYMANS: I see nodding of heads.

MS. BAUER: Yes.

MR. DYAR: Thank you, we have time constraints in our state of legislation.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Okay, two minutes is up, are we ready to vote now? All right, so to **the motion that is before us, all those in favor, please raise your hands. One, two, three, four, five, six, online is the seventh. Thank you, all those opposed, none. All**

those abstentions, one, two, three, and any null votes. Seeing none that motion carries, and now total, 7 to 0 with 3 abstentions.

MS. KERNS: Erika, I have a question about the intention of the motion that we passed for the southern states, as I know that sometimes the exceed or not exceed is confusing, which we talked about. Are we trying to manage to F or SPR? Because if it is F, then you would want to say not succeed in the highlighted text here. If it is SPR, which they are slightly tied together, I know it's confusing.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Go ahead, Erika.

MS. BURGESS: I have to do mental gymnastics every time I try and put this term in it. My goal and intention of this motion is that states would have an F30, 31, 32 up to 100, and that anything F29, 28, like that is bad. However, you all want to phrase it, not exceed.

MS. KERNS: Not exceed then. Thank you. Is the Board comfortable with fixing this to say not exceed? I see many thumbs up, great, no objections. Then I think for the PDT direction, I know Erika, you said you had some. I don't know if we have to do that here today. We could just e-mail it to us, unless there is something specific that you want to talk about. The sooner we get that direction though, the more we can meet that South Carolina timeline, because I think it's this stuff that is going to be harder to develop than the northern states on the Board.

CHAIR HAYMANS: At least the southern states have had a good opportunity to talk amongst ourselves over the last several months, and send things to the TC, and I don't see that changing. I think Erika pretty much has them ready to go, but we could send them as soon as we've had a chance to get back home. Yes, okay. If there is nothing else regarding these two, we have one more. Oh, Tracey.

MS. BAUER: Real quick before we move on from this topic. Since we've initiated an addendum, I will reach out to the Board to get nominations for the PDT after the meeting. Thanks.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Thank you for that piece of business. Okay, and so we'll go to Jeff now for Progress on the Atlantic Croaker Benchmark Stock Assessment.

PROGRESS UPDATE ON ATLANTIC CROAKER BENCHMARK STOCK ASSESSMENT

MR. KIPP: Yes, I just have a quick update on Atlantic Croaker and Spot Stock Assessment progress. It's been quite a while since this Board has last gotten an update, that was at the summer, 2024 meeting. Following that meeting the Stock Assessment Subcommittee did meet on October 30 of last year, to discuss different regional trends that have become more apparent as we've explored the data.

These are believed to be leading to some model instability when modeling the population on a coastwide scale. Ultimately, from that call, the SAS did recommend structuring the stock assessment with regional models, and transitioning away from a coastwide model. They identified the breakpoint between those regions being Cape Lookout, North Carolina.

At about the same time as this meeting, we got word that the lead analyst of the model had some workload constraints over the coming months, and that would take her away from further croaker model development at that time, and work was paused at that time. That was through February of this year, until she was freed up from those other responsibilities and could continue working on model development.

The SAS has picked back up recently with assessment development. As you could see there has been quite a lag, and so the SAS actually made some efforts to update data. The SAS met in February and April to plan and review those data updates. That included the addition of 2023 data. The terminal year originally set for this assessment

was 2022, which was getting outdated at this point. We did add 2023 data and partial 2024 data where it was available. We were right at the timeframe when 2024 data start to become available. The idea is to read this into this terminal year decision a little bit later into this year, and decide whether complete 2024 data can be used in the model, or if it will be used as more of an anchor on our terminal year of 2023. That decision is still to be made.

The datasets were divided regionally, based on this regional split that was determined by the SAS, and datasets from the South Atlantic were reconsidered here. A lot of those were not considered very representative of the coastwide population that has been dominated by catch in the Mid-Atlantic and Chesapeake Bay regions.

With this regional shift they felt it was appropriate to revisit some of those datasets for potential inclusion in the stock assessment. We did confirm a second lead analyst that will be leading the South Atlantic Region model. Just for timelines, the SAS did draft a new timeline here, to give some sense as to the next steps on this assessment. The proposed milestones are listed here. We will spend the summer developing these regional assessment models. Tentatively we have an Assessment Workshop scheduled for October.

The winter of this year and into next year would be for drafting the Croaker Assessment Report, and then we would go through a review with the Technical Committee. Hopefully approval of that assessment for release to the Peer Review in February, and then we would have the Peer Review Workshop in April of next year, and that assessment would be presented to this Board at the August, summer 2026 meeting. Just as a reminder, when we lost our original lead analyst for croaker due to job changes earlier in this assessment.

The SAS recommended we decouple the croaker and spot assessments and focus on the

croaker assessment first, while planning to pick up with the spot assessment once the croaker assessment was completed. As part of this new proposed timeline, we put together a proposed timeline for spot now as well, and the milestones for that assessment are up here, and they do overlap a little bit, to try and get that assessment ramped up, as the croaker assessment wraps up and gets ready for peer review.

We've proposed May of 2026 as a data due date. Spot assessment model development over the summer of next year, a Spot Stock Assessment Workshop in October of next year, and then the winter of 2026 and 2027 to draft the Spot Stock Assessment Report.

That would then go to the Technical Committee in February of 2027 for their review, and then we've tentatively got a Peer Review Workshop scheduled for April of 2027, with that Spot stock assessment to come before the Board at the summer meeting of 2027. That is what I've got for my update. I can take any questions on the spot and croaker assessments.

CHAIR HAYMANS: Are there any questions? Rich.

MR. WONG: Just a comment. I would urge that you try to get that 2024 terminal year, get the '24 data for your terminal year for that croaker assessment. We are seeing just incredible index values for 2024 all across the coast. It would be nice to capture what is going on there.

ADJOURNMENT

CHAIR HAYMANS: Anyone else? Seeing none; thank you very much, Jeff. Okay, any other business to come before the Sciaenids Board? Seeing none; motion to adjourn by heading out the door to lunch. Thank you very much.

(Whereupon the meeting adjourned at 12:05 p.m. on Tuesday, May 6, 2025)