

**PROCEEDINGS OF THE**  
**ATLANTIC STATES MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION**  
**COASTAL PELAGICS MANAGEMENT BOARD**

**The Westin**  
**Annapolis, Maryland**  
**Hybrid Meeting**

**October 22, 2024**

**Approved February 4, 2026**

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

Call To Order, Chair Spud Woodward .....	1
Approval Of Agenda .....	1
Approval Of Proceedings.....	1
Public Comment .....	1
Update On Sedar 95 Stock Assessment For Atlantic Cobia.....	1
Consider 2025 Atlantic Cobia Regional Recreational Measures .....	6
Technical Committee Report.....	6
Consider Options For Northern Region Recreational Measures And Timeline For Selecting And Implementing Final Measures.....	10
Atlantic Cobia Technical Committee Report .....	13
Addendum II Confidence Interval Approach.....	13
Update From South Atlantic Fishery Management Council On Mackerel Port Meetings .....	17
Adjournment .....	18

## INDEX OF MOTIONS

1. **Approval of agenda** by consent (Page 1).
2. **Approval of Proceedings of August 2024** by consent (Page 1).
3. **Move to approve the Cobia Technical Committee methodology for developing recreational management options to meet the northern region reduction. States in the northern region will select a set of measures for 2025-2026 and submit implementation plans for Board consideration by January 1, 2025. States in the northern region must implement the new measures by April, 1, 2025. If states in the northern region cannot come to a consensus on which measures to implement, a virtual Board meeting will be scheduled to select measures.** (Page 12). Motion by Pat Geer; second by Joe Cimino. Motion passes by consent with 3 abstentions (SC, GA, FL) (Page 13).
4. **Move to adjourn** by consent (Page 18).

## **ATTENDANCE**

### **Board Members**

Jason McNamee, RI (AA)	James Minor, VA (GA)
Eric Reid, RI, proxy for Sen. Sosnowski (LA)	Chris Batsavage, NC, proxy for K. Rawls (AA)
David Borden, RI (GA)	Chad Thomas, NC, proxy for Rep. Wray (LA)
Jesse Hornstein, NY, proxy for Marty Gary (AA)	Jerry Mannen, NC (GA)
Jim Gilmore, NY, proxy for Assy. Thiele (LA)	Ben Dyar, SC, proxy for Blaik Keppler (AA)
S. Curatolo Wagemann, NY, proxy for E. Hasbrouck (GA)	Mel Bell, SC, proxy for Sen. Cromer (LA)
Joe Cimino, NJ (AA)	Malcolm Rhodes, SC (GA)
Adam Nowalsky, NJ, proxy for Sen. Gopal (LA)	Doug Haymans, GA (AA)
Jeff Kaelin, NJ (GA)	Spud Woodward, GA (GA)
John Clark, DE (AA)	Erika Burgess, FL, proxy for J. McCawley (AA)
Roy Miller, DE (GA)	Gary Jennings, FL (GA)
Lynn Fegley, MD (AA)	Ron Owens, PRFC
David Sikorski, MD, proxy for Del. Stein (LA)	John Carmichael, SAFMC
Russ Dize, MD (GA)	Jack McGovern, NMFS
Pat Geer, VA, proxy for Jamie Green (AA)	

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

### **Ex-Officio Members**

Angelia Giuliano, Technical Committee Chair

### **Staff**

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

The Coastal Pelagics Management Board of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission convened in the Capitol Ballroom via hybrid meeting, in-person and webinar; Tuesday, October 22, 2024, and was called to order at 12:30 p.m. by Chair Spud Woodward.

### **CALL TO ORDER**

CHAIR SPUD WOODWARD: I'm going to go ahead and call the meeting of the Coastal Pelagics Management Board to order. For those of you that are online, this is Spud Woodward; Georgia's Governor's Appointee Commissioner and current chair of the Coastal Pelagics Management Board.

### **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

CHAIR WOODWARD: Our first item of business is Approval of the Agenda. Are there any modifications or suggested additions to the agenda? Seeing none; we'll consider the agenda accepted by unanimous consent.

### **APPROVAL OF PROCEEDINGS**

CHAIR WOODWARD: You also have the proceedings from the August, 2024 meeting of this Board. Are there any corrections, edits, modifications to those minutes? Any opposition to accepting those minutes that are presented? Seeing none; we'll consider those accepted by unanimous consent.

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

CHAIR WOODWARD: At this time, we open up for public comment on any items for this Board that are not on the agenda. Is there any public comment from any one in the room? I don't see any, anybody online? We don't have anybody online, so we'll move "along."

### **UPDATE ON SEDAR 95 STOCK ASSESSMENT FOR ATLANTIC COBIA**

CHAIR WOODWARD: Our next item is an update on SEDAR 95, which is our Planned Stock Assessment for Atlantic Migratory Group Cobia,

and I'm going to turn that over to Pat Campfield.

MR. PATRICK A. CAMPFIELD: This will be quick. Is there a file we can put up, or should we just skip that? In short, the Cobia Stock Assessment through the SEDAR process had started, was scheduled for completion about a year from now, November of 2025. On the pro side, a number of data webinars, a look at life history data indices, removals occurred over the summer.

Showing progress and perhaps new analytical or modeling possibilities for getting creative with the Cobia Stock Assessment. However, the lead analyst from the National Marine Fisheries Service and Southeast Science Center that was assigned to cobia changed jobs and left NMFS, and so obviously that puts a stop to the next steps in the assessment to begin the cobia risk analyses.

In short, the bottom line is, the assessment will be delayed at least a year, to be finished in late 2026 if we wait for a new analyst from NMFS, with advice to you all, to the management board in early 2027. We recognize this is a significant delay, but with the loss of that lead analyst we're in a bit of a fix. I think that's all, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Any questions for Pat? Joe Cimino.

MR. JOE CIMINO: More of a comment. We have several species that are highly recreational dependent, and as we talked about with black drum, you know the importance of aligning these assessments with the new MRIP data. I really don't see any value in pushing this assessment ahead of newly calibrated peer reviewed MRIP estimates. I realize that puts us in a hell of a spot, because I think the terminal year of the last assessment was '17, '18.

We might potentially be looking at a decade out from the terminal year of the last assessment. With that said, I would fully support not fully going through the assessment to peer review, until we get the recalibrated MRIP estimates. But if there is anything that the TC or Stock Assessment

Subcommittee could recommend, as a way to kind of gauge where we are in the effort of this fishery, and provide some management guidance. I would fully support that as well.

MS. EMILIE FRANKE: I guess just to respond to that a little bit. I think the TC could, we'll have to meet in 2026 to talk about the 2027 through up to 2031 specs, and in the past the TC has requested additional projections based on the old assessment from NOAA, but they weren't able to provide any. The TC could talk about maybe any analyses they could do in the interim, but I think it might be pretty limited.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Yes, I think everybody shares your frustration, Joe. I know that the demand seems to always exceed capacity. You know we created a pretty high demand process here, and feeding it with timely, trustworthy information seems to be a challenge across the board. This one, unfortunately, seems to be falling into the same trap. I guess a question I have is, do we have any idea of when it will be staffed back up and the machine will go back to turning again?

MR. CAMPFIELD: In communicating with Eric Williams at the Southeast Center in the last couple of weeks, they are going to put an announcement out, he said in about a month. But we'll see how it goes from there. I think Eric's suggestion was about a year from now, fall of 2025 is when they would be hired.

Trained up familiar with BAM and some of the other models that have been used for cobia before. We might be able to plug into the assessment process. That would be the earliest. He also provided a caveat that it could take another six months after that, depending on who they hire.

CHAIR WOODWARD: What's our latest forecast for the FES bias study results, if possible, I guess changes in catch estimates from the past. Do you have anything on that? I'm trying to get at what Joe is talking about. If we hit the pause

button, how long is that pause going to be, and when would it be realistic for this Board to expect updated stock status information and corresponding catch level recommendations? I'm not going to hold you to it, I'm not going to make you sign anything, I'm just curious.

MR. CAMPFIELD: Others around the room may have more authority, certainly from NMFS, and my understanding is that pilot study will be finished late 2026. Is that right? Again, that will be a while before the essentially changed NMRIP numbers are out.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I guess what it comes down to, what is the comfort level in something like this. We don't have control over a lot of it, but what is our comfort level in terms of, and as Emilie was saying, I think your TC is going to struggle, the information that they would be using to make projections is getting pretty doggone stale. It's going to be of questionable value.

We may not have a lot of choice in this matter, but we may just be left at status quo for a while. But I guess we'll just see how this proceeds, and if we can get anything that helps us have a better context for where we are and where we need to be going, we'll certainly try to do it. Any further questions of comments on this? Lynn.

MS. LYNN FEGLEY: It might be in a side, but I know we talked around the Policy Board or the Executive Committee about the issues, sort of globally with a dearth of stock assessment scientists. I'm just kind of wondering if there was any inkling, do we have people coming out, are they going to get good applicants? I mean I'm just curious as it happens, if we're finding people to come up and take these jobs.

MR. CAMPFIELD: I'll answer delicately that at least for the Commission Stock Assessment Scientists, we have a well-known pipeline or recruitment, various universities, and population dynamics modeling labs that we recruit from. It's been successful to date. I think all of the stock assessment enterprises on our coast and around the country pull from similar

locations. But there is a pipeline, it's not overly abundant, but it exists.

CHAIR WOODWARD: All right, John Carmichael.

MR. JOHN CARMICHAEL: Then on the FES, we got a presentation at the September Council meeting and MRIP says they are still on track to anticipate having the calibrated data finalized spring of '26, so completing the study, doing the analysis, and then calibrating things as they need to. They are saying early '26 hopefully.

It sounds like the timing of this assessment might be so close that you decide to wait and get that new information in there. I mean if they're not going to have someone ready to even start on it until '25, I would suspect the TC and others would at least want to advance the terminal year over where it is now, you don't want to go into the assessment three or four years behind.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Jay.

DR. JASON McNAMEE: Yes, so the timing of the recreational information. I'm not kind of factoring that in here, but I wonder, so Lynn's comment I thought was a good one, and I wondered, has there been an attempt, so if somebody left at NOAA there is potentially a little slack in the budget there. I was wondering, could NRP be put out to one of these universities, just to have an assessment done in the interim here. They can usually operate pretty quickly, if you kind of set the parameters up that way. Just trying to get creative here. That's a long time to go without an assessment, and to use projections that are that old is not great.

MR. CAMPFIELD: Yes, thanks for the creative suggestion and idea, Jay. That has worked for other stock assessments. I think we did that in a similar fashion for weakfish a number of years ago. I guess the question is, who pays for it. I don't know if we want to get into that this afternoon.

But we did ask leadership within the Southeast Science Center, and at least for their responsibilities they said they are fast tracking this replacement using their funds for those kinds of stock assessment positions. That avenue has been answered. But we haven't explored it at the Commission level for a variety of reasons.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I do have an offering plate up here we can circulate around with the sign-in sheet if folks want to make a donation. It's a relevant question, and I think back to Lynn's comments is, it's not only the lead scientist, but it's all the supporting, you know cast of characters it takes to pull off a SEDAR or one of those. I mean that's the other limiting factor is that additional supporting capacity. Those folks are working at pretty high-capacity demand too. We've set up a high demand system, and we continue to struggle to feed it.

It means you've got to make difficult priority decisions. I know it's certainly the federal, that's the case, when you're dealing with multiple species. I guess we'll see if the Science Center is actually able to get somebody on staff expeditiously, and this timeline that John described, kind of it may just sync itself up and we may be left not in a desirable position, but in a necessary position, like the aggregate of circumstances. Any, Bob.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ROBERT E. BEAL: Just a question. Based on this conversation, we'll go back and try to find some options. Is it a better outcome for the Board if we do wait until the recalibrated FES numbers are out and the new data is out in the spring, or if there is an option, I don't know a contractor or something in the interim, should we pursue that?

In other words, what is a better outcome? The concern is if we pursue a contractor of some sort, and I don't know where the funding comes from, and that is completed, and that is before the new data comes out through FES, then are we delayed, pick a number, three years, until our next shot at this? I'm just trying to sort of figure out what road you want staff to go down, to try to make something happen.

I know there are pros and cons both ways, obviously. Waiting until '27, you know a decade out from the last read we had on the stock is a long time. I don't want to push really hard on SEDAR to try to find another assessment person, or something, to get this done early, but then the Board is frustrated, because we don't have the new data in there. Just trying to figure out which one we should chase down as staff.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I think we're all struggling with that, because first of all, we don't know for sure when the FES bias study results and those calibrations are actually going to be delivered, so that is an uncertainty. Then okay, say we found the resources to do something now. Well, we're still going to be plagued with uncertainty, because of the time that has lapsed between the last assessment and the terminal years and all that. I guess the real question is, if you find the resources you do something now, you get results, you get catch level recommendations, and then you may be facing changing them a year later, you know based on updated catch information.

Do you hitch your wagon to the Science Center, hope they do the best they can, and we get it as quick as we can. Then if we have to go back and do something based on new data, then it may fall to us to find the resources to do the update to the assessment, in order to make sure that we have the most current information. I'm kind of thinking maybe that, but I will certainly defer to the Board. Lynn, and then I'll go to Jay.

MS. FEGLEY: Somebody more steeped in assessments, correct me if I'm not thinking about this right. But it seems to me that given the length of time, and this is a benchmark assessment. It seems that the right thing to do is do whatever we can to get the benchmark completed, because if the methodology is approved and the methodology is correct, then once the updated estimates move through, it seems as though an update could occur.

We don't know what the recalibration is going to look like. Maybe it will result in some sort of scaling effect, I don't know. But it seems like a benchmark is a big deal. Maybe the better idea would be to get it going, and then when those new data come in, it might be a simpler matter just to run an update.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Jay, then I'll go to Doug.

DR. MCNAMEE: I'm on Team Lynn on this one. I was having the same thought; you know there is an attribute here to kind of creating the assessment. We could be kind of prescriptive there, if we think we could confer with the Science Center. If there is like a type of assessment that they are sort of targeting in their assessment enterprise.

We could say that that is the type of assessment that we want, and there is this attribute of it getting built ahead of time, which the tool would then be available moving forward. Then we can also explicitly ask for explorations, with regard to the recreational data. There is this sentiment that there may be some bias one way or the other.

We put a term of reference in the RFP to say, we want you to look into that, confer with the folks at, I'm blanking on the acronym, but the folks that run MRIP, and kind of get a sense of hey, which way is the bias on a species like this would you think? Then have the person test in that direction, so we get kind of a sense of the effect of that, but also then, whatever the data looks like, it can just get plugged in later. I like the idea of kind of pushing forward if there is a way to do it.

CHAIR WOODWARD: All right, Doug, then I'll go to you, Justin.

MR. DOUG HAYMANS: I guess my question goes back several commenters. Just to clarify, we're not married to the Southeast Regional Center being the lead, right? I mean if there is capacity within a state or the Council or anywhere else, we're not married to the feds, waiting for them to hire somebody before we can restart, right? Is there a reason why it has to be feds?



MR. CAMPFIELD: That has been the pattern historically for cobia and Spanish mackerel, menhaden notably for the Southeast Center, but it is up to you all. It's up to the Board and the Commission to decide if you want to deviate from that. Also, in the context of the number of stock assessments that you all in the states, and our assessment staff already support. That is a heavy workload already, so it has to be really thought through if you want to add another assessment and take it out of the NMFS realm.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Yes, and I'm going to play the devil's advocate here. If we release the Science Center from this partnership, then we might not ever get it back. I think it may be important that we try to hold the line as much as we can, and get them to continue to contribute in support of our activities. But I guess at some point you have to make the hard decision; you know is that limiting to the point that it's putting us in an untenable position? Joe.

MR. CIMINO: I don't think we are at it, but one of the added expenses would be to go to that extent that we have done a few times of actually paying for an independent peer review and paying those folks for their time and all that. It adds up quickly. I guess I'm going to ask Pat. I'm going to ask you a question here.

I see this somewhat as a data poor species, right? I think if we did add fisheries independent data, we probably could have used some of that just as guidance, even without an updated assessment. We don't really have that. You mentioned that things were getting started. Do you have a feel of where this can go? To me, I wasn't even sure we would be passing peer review, so I very, very much appreciate Jay and Lynn's comments.

I mean if we know we're almost at a nonstarter, you know we don't have a great comfort level of what we can do. I think we should be exploring what to do, but to go all the way and

pull that trigger, and then say, a year later we get the data that we need. I'm not sure how comfortable I am in that. Did you get far enough as a group to say, what comfort level do you have on an assessment that should be able to pass peer review?

MS. ANGELA GIULIANO: Having been a member of the Stock Assessment Subcommittee, I can say that we had reviewed the available fishery dependent data. One of the big hurdles with this assessment is going to be an Index of Abundance. In the past they had used the Headboat Survey, which even in the last assessment they had to remove the last two years because of the federal fishery closures. The Science Center indicated we shouldn't use that survey going forward. We had been exploring a couple alternatives.

The lead sort of index at that time was probably on MRIP fishery dependent index, if we could somehow figure out some modification to account for technology increase and people through time there has definitely been a growing interest and ability to target these fish. That was about where we were when we got the notice from the Center. I think if we can develop an index, probably a similar model to what was run last time could be accomplished. If not, we would be exploring some more data poor options.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Follow up, Joe?

MR. CIMINO: Yes, thank you, follow up. In that case, if what we're talking about is kind of like an MRIP CPUE or some sort of MRIP based index. I would say I would be happy to wait for the recalibrated MRIP to get a full-on peer review, but use that MRIP Index as guidance in the meantime, and have that presented, maybe even a desktop peer review by some folks like we've done with red drum in the past as some guidance. I hate to put forth all the effort and then a year down the line say, well now we've got the recalibrated MRIP estimates.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Bob, are you clear on that? It sounds like we circled back around to, we're sort of

going to wait and see what happens with the Science Center with their staffing. I mean we are basically at a total standstill until that person comes onboard. Basically, we're at a standstill. It sounds like it's going to be important to know what we're dealing with, in terms of the inputs. I did see another hand. Dan, go ahead.

MR. BEN DYAR: My question may not be able to be answered, but just something to think about. I know that we're talking about conflict of assessments and time limitability to be able to conduct multiple assessments from even the Science Center. Are we confident that that is the only hurdle moving forward to getting it started again is someone getting rehired, or a year later from now are we going to find ourselves potentially having to compete with other assessments that have been started by that time?

MR. CAMPFIELD: Thanks, Ben. In short, our understanding from NMFS and the Southeast Center is cobia remains a top priority. The SEDAR Steering Committee, which sets the schedule there up for the southeast meets every six months. They will meet again late winter. That will be the next opportunity to confirm that, but everything we've heard since the staffing change is that cobia remains a priority.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Okay, I think we've got general agreement that we'll let this play out as it is. Just FYI, this Board will probably not need to meet anytime in the near future. But we can certainly figure out a proper venue to provide updates on this, even if it is not a full Pelagics Board meeting.

Maybe one of our other Policy Board meetings or something, just keep everybody updated on this. Everybody comfortable with that? Okay, very good, we'll move along.

## **CONSIDER 2025 ATLANTIC COBIA REGIONAL RECREATIONAL MEASURES**

CHAIR WOODWARD: Our next item is to Consider the 2025 Atlantic Cobia Regional Recreational Measures, and I'm going to call on Angela to give a TC report.

### **TECHNICAL COMMITTEE REPORT**

MS. GIULIANO: The first presentation I have for you today as mentioned is on Potential Recreational Management Measures for the Northern Region, starting in 2025. Going back through time a little bit. At the last Coastal Pelagics Board Meeting Addendum II was approved, and per Addendum II rather than managing the catches at a state-by-state target level, we are now managing the coastwide recreational harvest between two regions.

A northern region that includes Virginia north, which is allocated 68.7 percent of our coastwide recreational quota, and the southern region, which is allocated 31.3 percent. Again, these new allocation harvest targets are under the current coastwide quota of 76,908 fish on the recreational side. An additional change with Addendum II was that we can now evaluate harvest against the harvest targets for up to five years of data. However, given the current regulatory changes that occurred in 2021, for this we evaluated each region's average harvest across 2021 to 2023 against this target to see if reductions were necessary in 2025.

This table shows first the recreational harvest targets with the new allocation scheme for the northern and southern region, starting with the northern region. The new harvest target is 52,825 fish, based on the 2021 through 2023 average recreational harvest we are about 10,000 fish over the target, which means that the northern region would be required to take a 15.9 percent reduction to bring us back to the recreational harvest target level.

The southern region the recreational harvest target is now 24,083 fish, and the average recreational

harvest over that 3-year time period was 23,474 fish. Given that is under target, the southern region can maintain status quo management measures, either until a management change is required with a reduction or the completion of the CR95 stock assessment.

In Addendum II, it specifies that in order for us to implement this 15.9 percent reduction, we currently within the region have to get all of the states onto the same size and vessel limit. However, seasons are allowed to vary across the coast, due to the migratory nature of cobia through the summertime.

The FMP also specifies that the minimum size limit cannot be below 40 inches total length, or 36 inches fork length. If we look at our current regulations, Delaware, New Jersey, New York and Rhode Island are currently under the de minimis regulations that were allowed in the previous amendment or addendum, so they all have a 37-inch total length size limit with a 1-fish vessel limit and are opened all year long.

As an alternative de minimis measure, Maryland and PRFC have matched Virginia's regulations, which is a 40-inch total length minimum size limit with a 2-fish vessel limit, and a season that is open from June 15 to September 15. It should be noted here that Virginia's regulations also are currently a little bit more conservative, with only allowing 1 of those 2 fish per vessel to be over 50 inches.

However, that regulation is not one that was carried over to Maryland for the Potomac River. The first step in all of this is basically for the Technical Committee to develop methods to address changing either size limits, the vessel limit, or the season lengths to achieve that reduction, or some combination of those options.

As was used for other species as well as cobia in the past, there is an inclusion we use to combine these different reduction methods, in order to estimate what the cumulative

reduction would be, and this is basically done so that we're not double counting fish, we're not saving a fish with a size limit change as well as the vessel limit change, but only counting that fish once.

For all of these analyses, the MRIP data was pooled for 2021, 2022 and 2023, again, because that is the time period when regulations have been consistent since the last changes. As I mentioned earlier, the first thing with Addendum II is that all states are required to have at least a 40-inch total length minimum size limit. That would require that Delaware through Rhode Island increase their minimum size from 37 inches total length to at least 40. The Technical Committee considered ways to try giving credit for this increase in size limit.

But there just really wasn't enough data. There were only a handful of fish lengths collected by MRIP for Delaware through Rhode Island in those three years, and at least on the initial look at it, all of the fish were over 40 inches already. There is no credit given for that as far as we were able to quantify.

The second part of this then was using the MRIP length frequencies for all states in the region, or in this case Virginia through Rhode Island to explore the various size limit options. We're assuming all states start at the minimum 40-inch size limit. We did end up including both imputed and non-imputed lengths in this analysis, due to sample size issues again, and a much higher sample size with using some of those imputed lengths.

These analyses do account for a 5 percent release mortality for any new discards that occur as the result of the right change. If the region decides to implement a 1-fish vessel limit, this ended up calculating what that reduction would be using the Maryland and Virginia data. It should be noted here the Potomac River, for those that aren't familiar with it, the landings estimated from that jurisdiction end up either in Maryland's estimate or Virginia's estimate, depending on whichever side of the river someone lands on and they are intercepted.

Those are covered with just the Maryland and Virginia MRIP data. But basically, we compiled the MRIP trip intercept data to determine the number of fish harvested per vessel trip, and the number of anglers. When we did this, we assumed that any trip that had previously harvested two fish, that trip would still occur, but they would just now harvest the single fish and release the other one.

If the Board decides that they would rather keep the 2-fish vessel limit for Maryland, Virginia and PRFC, that means that the states from Delaware through Rhode Island would increase their vessel limit from 1 fish to 2 fish. Again, there really wasn't sufficient MRIP data to calculate what that increase could be.

We've initially tried using methods used by North Carolina in the past that had intercepts where a fish was harvested, as well as released, and we could now move one of the released fish over as a harvested fish, but in this case all of the intercepts if they harvested a fish, they didn't release any cobia.

Instead, what we're presenting to the Board is a range of options, assuming either a lower bound where there is no change in the Delaware through Rhode Island harvest estimate with this vessel limit change, as well as a kind of upper bound where we basically just doubled the harvest that we have observed in the past.

Then the average between those two would be an increase of 1.3 percent. All the tables you'll see later do use this 2.5 upper bound scenario, and that is really because it's kind of a, I don't want to say worst case scenario, but it's the higher end of what we would expect. There were really very few differences between using the upper bound or average when calculating options. The few that occurred are noted on the tables when we get there. Lastly, for the season methods, we calculated season reductions only for the Maryland/Virginia/PRFC part of the region.

Again, we don't have sufficient MRIP data for states Delaware north. If any seasons are implemented in those states, they are not credited for the reduction. But again, the Addendum does say that seasons may differ between states and regions. Any reduction you see is just per season change would be Maryland and Virginia only.

Similar to past changes in calculations, for the Maryland through Virginia season reductions we calculated that over the three years by individual harvest date through the Wave, this is a little bit different than what we do for other species, just because of the short seasons and pulse nature of these fisheries. There could be differences in catch rates, either early in the season or towards the end of the season.

It often only occurs for part of a Wave when seasons may be open or fish are available. That's what was done for the reductions. As mentioned earlier when we looked at the vessel limit change of potentially Maryland through Virginia going to a 1-fish vessel limit, it overshot that 15.9 percent reduction.

We did look into the possibility of increasing the season length to compensate for that. In this case, we just calculated a daily catch rate based off the number of days the season was open over that timeframe. This does however, mean that there is uncertainty due to those varying daily catch rates.

You know, if you're only adding a few days there are going to be differences between weekend, week days, that sort of thing, and this daily rate kind of average was over all of that uncertainty. Before I present options, the TC does emphasize the sources of uncertainty and management considerations that the Board should be thinking about as you contemplate which management options to implement.

The first of that being analysis assumes that fish availability besides length frequencies, and the angler effort are the same in future years as what we observed in 2021 through 2023. If any of that changes we could see different results in the future.

Additionally, if cobia's range continues to expand, more fish could become available to those northern states and harvest an increase despite management measures to reduce the harvest.

The TC also discussed certain states seeing larger fish in general, particularly at the northern part of the range. If some states do primarily see a larger fish, any sort of maximum slot limit could limit the available fish for harvest. As I just mentioned, the season expansion analysis assumes a constant daily harvest, due to the lack of recent data outside the current season, so that adds a little bit of uncertainty when you're looking to expand the season.

The TC also had a long discussion about how difficult large cobia are to measure on the vessel, so it's possible that if you're having to get a fish on the boat to check the maximum size limit or a much higher minimum size limit, there could be injury to the fish, as well as resulting increasing dead discards. We also used the 5 percent discard mortality rate from the previous assessment, which I do not believe invoked gaffing. The effect of gaffing may not be fully captured in our assumed release mortality rate.

Though it should be noted that at least in the northern region, where Virginia makes up the bulk of the harvest, Virginia has had a ban on gaffing for cobia since 2021. The last thing the TC wanted to note was regarding Virginia's current size limit, which only allows for 1 fish if the 2-per vessel be over 50 inches.

As I mentioned, Virginia is the only state that has this rule, and all of the length frequencies we used for the analysis include this caveat with the Virginia data. Unsurprisingly, most of the data is coming out of Virginia, since that is where most of the harvest is. It is unclear if the Board would want to implement these criteria for all states in the region.

If the provision is implemented for the entire region, there is the potential for anglers to start high grading. If the provision is removed in favor of a slot limit, with the 2 fish vessel limit, you know something like the 2 fish harvested up to 53 inches, you have 2 large fish. There potentially could be more harvest of those larger fish.

However, it should be noted that in the years we looked at for '21 through '23, only about a third of the Maryland and Virginia trips were limiting out at the vessel level. Overall, it's difficult to quantify what the impact of this regulation would be on the rest of the coast. Moving into the tables next after this slide, all of these management options are estimated to achieve at least the 50.9 percent reduction in the northern region. Each option has three components, the size limit, the vessel limit and the season for Maryland, PRFC and Virginia only.

It should be noted this isn't an exhaustive list, it was kind of a summary list of what options we thought were viable, but the Technical Committee can provide other combinations of size limits and seasons, if there is something particular the Board is interested in. Splitting up across two slides, this first slide, the first option basically is the one that reduces the vessel limit to 1 fish, and allows for a slightly expanded fishing season of about one week. It maintains the 40-inch minimum size limit.

The second option keeps that 40-inch minimum size, as well as the 2 fish vessel limit that is currently in place for Maryland through Virginia, but reduces the season length, either on the front end or the back end of the 16.7, because if you reduce the back end to August 25 versus reducing a season in the beginning of the year at June 30, that is the 24.4 percent reduction.

Options 3 through 4 on this slide increase the minimum size, as well as reduce the season length. Then Option 5 raises the minimum size but maintains the current Maryland through Virginia seasons and the current 2-fish vessel limit at 43 inches. On this last slide it gets into all of the various slot options that the TC considered.

These top four options again, all have the 2-fish vessel limit and maintain that 40-inch minimum size limit. The first one is a slot limit needed to maintain the current season dates, and then the second through fourth options differ by adjusting the upper size limit as well as the seasons. Then these last two options on here also increase the minimum size limit, as well as put that maximum size limit on, but are able to maintain the June 15 through September 15 season for Maryland through Virginia. Those are the asks of the Technical Committee prepared for your consideration today, and at this point I can take any questions on the methods, though I will say, Emilie will be presenting timeline, so anything related to that will come up next.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Thank you, Angela. Questions for Angela on the TCs evaluation. Jay.

DR. McNAMEE: Thanks, Angela, great presentation. As I was reading the memo and as you're going through that, I'm like having flashbacks to the Summer Flounder, Scup, Black Sea Bass, it's that kind of trying to cobble together from scraps of data that you have, and you guys did a nice job with it, so good job.

I think what I was wondering is, if you explored, so I'll go back to scup, black sea bass and during the most recent, I don't know year, year and a half, some modeling approaches to doing this stuff have been investigated, so there is like a super fancy, the RDM model that they run out of the Science Center.

Then there was a simpler approach that was proposed at the same time that just used gam models. I wondered if you guys had explored, there may not be enough data for the like the fancy model, I think there is an updater to run the gams, your modeling approach. Just to offer why and suggesting this, you know when you piece these things together, they actually interact.

You know if you change the bag and change the season there is like an interaction between those two things, which when you're dealing them separately it's not accounted for. Maybe you did account for it. We used to have this little equation that we would kind of use, but I think a better way to do it is through a modeling approach that is integrating everything, so yes, thanks.

MS. GIULIANO: Yes, so currently the way we are accounting for it is the little equation, which essentially is looking at the overlap between these percentages during that overlap. We have not explored a modeling approach, I know I've heard that discussed for other species, but that has not come up on the Cobia TC at this point. It could be something to look into.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Any other questions for Angela before I go to Emilie for the timeline. Seeing none; Emilie, turn it over to you.

#### **CONSIDER OPTIONS FOR NORTHERN REGION RECREATIONAL MEASURES AND TIMELINE FOR SELECTING AND IMPLEMENTING FINAL MEASURES**

MS. FRANKE: I will just go over the potential timelines. We had some questions from board members on how this process would work and what the timeline would be, so staff put together a couple of possible timelines for your consideration, but also this is a Board decision, so if the Board has other timelines in mind, you know it is up to the Board.

Again, this is a Board decision for these northern region measures on when to actually select the measures and what date in 2025 to implement those measures. Just also a note, the Board can specify that these northern region measures would be in place for '25 and '26, to align with our current coastwide recreational quota, which is in place through 2026. This first possible timeline would be for the Board to actually select the northern region measures today, and in that case the states in the northern region would submit implementation plans by a specified date, and the Board could

review those implementation plans via e-mail vote. The next possible timeline, Timeline 2 would be that the Board approve the TC methodology today.

Then the states in the northern region could take some time after the meeting today to coordinate and consider the options, and then if all the states in the northern region can come to a consensus on which measures to implement, the states could submit implementation plans by a specified date for the Board to consider via e-mail vote.

This would be if the Full Board was comfortable with this approach of letting the northern states come to that agreement outside of a Board meeting, based on the suite of options from the TC, and then providing their final implementation plans to the Full Board. Then the third possible timeline is similar.

States could take some time after this meeting to consider the options, however, if the states in the northern region cannot come to consensus, then we would need to schedule a full board meeting via webinar to vote on which measures to implement for the northern region. Again, if the Board has other timelines in mind, that would be a Board decision, so happy to take any questions.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Questions for Emilie? With no questions then, Doug.

MR. HAYMANS: I know that we've talked about this at previous meetings, but I want to make sure I understand. Is conservation equivalency for those states still in play after they agree on a common set, or is conservation equivalency off the table?

MS. FRANKE: Conservation equivalency is off the table. Yes, as discussed for Addendum II, you know the objective of this regional management is to have the consistent vessel and size limit, so states cannot deviate from whichever set of options is selected. But the

seasons can vary, of course, but they can't deviate from the vessel or size limits.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Follow up, Doug.

MR. HAYMANS: Okay, I thought that was it, but I wanted to make sure. But go back to that last slide you had up. I want to make sure I understand what that slide is saying. It's saying that if the northern portion of this can agree then they make their own decision. But if they can't, then it comes to the Full Board and this end of the table gets involved at that point, right?

MS. FRANKE: Right, at that point it would be a Full Board vote if the states cannot come to consensus.

MR. HAYMANS: All right, I just want to keep that in mind.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Jay.

DR. McNAMEE: Just to make sure I'm understanding the difference between 2 and 3 is just that 3 is explicit about what happens if there is like lack of agreement amongst the northern states. It kind of defines what would happen after that, but Timeline 3 is also inclusive of Timeline 2, like if we do come to a consensus than that is fine.

MS. FRANKE: Right, so maybe the labeling of 2 and 3 as separate options is confusing, but they are essentially the same option, where the states have time after this meeting to consider measures, and if the states can come to consensus, then the states can just submit their implementation plans to the Board via e-mail. But if the states can't come to consensus, then we need to have another Board meeting to vote on those measures.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Lynn, are you sure? Come on. Okay, go ahead, Mr. Clark.

MR. JOHN CLARK: I just wanted to clarify. When you said can have different seasons that includes no season, right? It can just be open continuously, but we will have to change the size limit, even though it

can't be measured what difference we're having as de minimis states.

MS. FRANKE: Correct, so a state can have, I'm sorry, any state besides Maryland and Virginia can have a year-round season or any season, because we can't quantify that, and correct, we can't quantify that jump for Rhode Island through Delaware for that 37 to 40.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Having a little buyer's remorse there, John?

MR. CLARK: Just being a crotchety old bureaucrat, hating to have to change a regulation yet again for a species no one is catching.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I understand. The Board does have to give some guidance here. If you've got an alternative outside of these three, describe it. If one of these seems to be a best choice. Mr. Geer.

MR. PATRICK GEER: Mr. Chairman, I'm ready to make a motion.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Good.

MR. GEER: I think the staff have it at this point.

CHAIR WOODWARD: If it could be displayed and read it into the record, and we'll hopefully get a second.

MR. GEER: Okay, I'm going to have to modify a couple places on there, but **move to approve the Cobia Technical Committee methodology for developing recreational management options to meet the northern region reduction. That is Timeline Option 2. States in the northern region will select a set of measures for 2025-2026 and submit implementation plans for Board consideration by January 1, 2025. States in the northern region must implement the new measures by April, 1, 2025. If the states in the northern region cannot come to a consensus on which measures to**

**implement, a virtual Board meeting will be scheduled to select measures.** If I get a second.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I have a second, Joe Cimino second. Just a question before we get into discussion. It didn't really come up before, but if it required a virtual Board meeting, do we want to put in there a time certain for implementation of the measures, regardless of whether it's a consensus or a Board deliberation, or do we leave that open ended?

MR. GEER: I have confidence in my fellow Commissioners that we are going to reach consensus on this.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I appreciate confidence, it's a good thing. Discussion on the motion. Jay.

DR. McNAMEE: Yes, so this motion, I think we're kind of looking at the suite of options. I'll back up. The timelines seem to imply something. Implied that we were kind of locked into the options that the Technical Committee put together. Does that preclude somebody like coming forward with some other type of analysis to kind of look at that? I'm fine if it does, I just want to be sure and not do some work if it's going to get ignored.

MS. FRANKE: Yes, so this would approve the TC methodology that Angela just presented, so any different methodology would not be considered at this point.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Further discussion or questions for clarification. Joe.

MR. CIMINO: I'm supportive of the timeline, because I think there are some big changes coming for the northern states. I think the sooner that we can put forth what options or what regulations will be coming, I think is very important. I think Spud, to your question. If it even came to a virtual Board meeting, I would still hope for an April 1 implementation date.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I just want to make sure that is understood, because it is not specifically stated in



there. Any further discussion? Do we need to caucus on this before a vote? Any need for caucusing? Don't see any heads nodding yes, so we're going to assume no, so I'm going to call the question. Any opposition to this motion? We'll try it that way first.

All right, seeing none, is there any **abstentions**? **We have South Carolina, Georgia and Florida abstaining.** Any null votes? Okay, **motion carries**, all right, thank you, Pat, for that. Appreciate that. Anything further on that, Emilie? Okay, I guess a question. Whose house are you all meeting at to sort this out?

MR. GEER: Good point. We'll organize the meeting. We'll set up that meeting with everybody.

#### **ATLANTIC COBIA TECHNICAL COMMITTEE REPORT**

CHAIR WOODWARD: Okay, all right, very good. We'll move along on our agenda here, and go back to Angela. You know one of the things in the recently approved Addendum was consideration of a confidence interval approach to looking at the variability in the MRIP estimates, and so we've got a Technical Committee Report on that.

#### **ADDENDUM II CONFIDENCE INTERVAL APPROACH**

MS. GIULIANO: Moving into this agenda item. At the last Board meeting the Technical Committee was tasked to discuss this confidence interval approach, and its potential application to the new regional allocation that were approved at the last Board meeting. As part of this task, we are also tasked with a discussion of other confidence interval levels, in addition to the 95 percent confidence interval that was referenced in Addendum II. Again, a refresher, though we covered part of this with the last presentation. Currently, we use a rolling average approach. Each region's average recreational landings are

evaluated against the regional target. Previously this was a 3-year timeline, but under Addendum II now we're averaging up to 5 years of data that has been under the same management measures. If a region's average landings exceed the target, the region must adjust measures to reduce harvest to the target level.

If a region's annual harvest is below the target for at least two consecutive years, that region may liberalize, as long as they are not estimated to exceed the target. In Addendum II, there is a provision that the Board can vote to switch from the current rolling average approach to this confidence interval approach for harvest target evaluation.

The intention here was basically to more directly account for the uncertainty around the MRIP point estimates using the confidence intervals. Instead of comparing the rolling average harvest against the target, it compares at 95 percent confidence intervals through the harvest target each year. Again, similar to the current rolling average approach.

The evaluation period would include up to five years, assuming the same management measures were in place. In this provision, it says that if the entire confidence interval is above the harvest target for a majority of the years, the harvest is estimated to have been above the target, and the region must take a reduction.

Alternatively, if the entire confidence interval is below the target for a majority of years, the harvest has been estimated to have been below the target and the region could liberalize. However, if the harvest target falls within the confidence interval for the majority of the years, the region maintains status quo measures.

Then ultimately however, if the confidence interval evaluation indicates that action is needed, the average landings are still used to calculate that percent reduction needed, reduction or liberalization relative to the target. I know on the

PDT there was some discussion about what the majority of years means.

In this case if we had five years it could be three out of five years or two out of three years would count as a majority, if it's split evenly, such as two out of four years or one out of two years, then the Technical Committee would recommend management action. This confidence interval provision also tried to align with the MRIP recommendation, so years of PSEs greater than 50, with those estimates having high PSE values would be excluded from the evaluation.

Years with PSEs between 30 to 50, which MRIP recommends using caution, would be reviewed by the TC, to determine whether to include them in the evaluation. The Technical Committee applied the confidence interval approach to the current 2021 through 2023 evaluation period, as well as the previous 2017 through 2019 period, which is the last time we evaluated measures. It should be noted that earlier time period in 2017 through 2019, the evaluation was still state by state, so the Technical Committee assumed the regional framework was in place for the exercise. Just to give you a range of what the options might look like.

In addition to the 95 percent confidence interval, we also examined the 90 percent, 85 percent, 80 percent and a 50 percent confidence interval, just to explore a large range for you guys. While the Technical Committee doesn't have any final recommendations at this point, we do have some observations and initial input for the Board. Just as an example of what we're looking at here when we're discussing confidence intervals.

The example here is for the 2022 Virginia through Maine estimate of cobia harvest, with a PSE of 23.7. You can see here the point estimate is a harvest value of 43,841 fish. Essentially what the confidence interval is

telling us is that we are 95 percent sure that the actual harvest value is somewhere within that range.

In other words, if the surveys were conducted repeatedly, over and over again, the resulting confidence intervals would include the true population value 95 percent of the time. In this case for 95 percent confidence interval, we expect that the harvest estimate is lying somewhere between 23,495 fish up to 64,187 fish.

You'll see with the 80 percent confidence interval, you still have that same point estimate of 43,841 fish, but now that confidence range is smaller. The 80 percent confidence interval only goes from 30,533 fish up to 57,149 fish. You see that throughout the presentation when we look at some of the graphs on the next slide, but as we have smaller confidence intervals those error bars are getting smaller on the estimates.

Looking at the northern regions, again these two orangish/red colored lines on here are the three-year evaluation periods for 2017 through '19, and 2021 through 2023. In the past, as what we are currently doing, I shouldn't say in the past. Using the current methods, using a rolling average approach, both of these time periods were shown to be above the harvest target and reductions were taken or will be taken.

In both periods the 95 percent confidence intervals are the broadest, and showed that status quo measures could be anything. You'll see that across those lines those confidence intervals, the majority of the years are crossing the error bars. The smaller confidence intervals used during the 2017 through 2019 period, however, will see a particularly low confidence the 85 percent one, show that reductions were being good.

Then in the more recent time period, given the uncertainty with the data, status quo measures should be maintained across all of the various confidence interval options that we looked at. For the southern model, the current approach would have allowed for liberalization in the 2017 through

2019 period, and status quo for the 2021 through '23 period. As with the northern analysis, the 95 percent confidence interval was the most likely to result in a status quo recommendation, while liberalization was far more likely to be supported when using smaller confidence intervals in the 2017 through 2019 period. Some initial Technical Committee observations, as I just said, the 95 percent confidence intervals are fairly large considering the uncertainties in the cobia data being used. Using those 95 percent confidence intervals would most likely result in less frequent management changes, and more status quo determinations.

While the current rolling average approach doesn't account for the data uncertainties directly, it does allow for quicker response to changes in harvest through time. As I mentioned before, many of these confidence interval approaches that we evaluated outside of those 95 percent confidence intervals, resulted in similar management advice on whether to reduce or liberalize, compared to our current methods.

The one real big difference here would be the northern region for 2021 through 2023, where basically any of the confidence interval approaches would suggest that we should stay status quo rather than taking a reduction, as we currently are doing with the rolling average approach. We didn't see a similar determination until it got down to a 50 percent confidence interval.

As I mentioned before, the Technical Committee doesn't have a final recommendation on this approach at this time, but had some initial observations and input for the Board. The first was to consider how the Board's management goals for the harvest evaluations, well consider what your management goals are, and how the harvest evaluation should factor into that, as well as how responsive you would like to be.

Some of this I think, you know the Technical Committee felt could be dependent on other factors. We were just talking about the frequency of stock assessments and what's going on with the current stock assessment. In a case where the average harvest exceeds the target for a number of years, and the time between assessments is long, the Board may want to be more responsive, given the infrequent updates on stock status.

Also, just to note that this confidence interval approach would still require a number of Technical Committee decisions. Even though we have now reduced our PSEs by aggregating the MRIP data to regions, there are still a number of years that have PSEs between 30 and 50. It would be up to the Technical Committee to decide whether to include that year in the evaluation.

This is just a table showing what the regional PSEs look like for the northern and southern region, and all the yellow ones highlighted there are ones between 30 and 50. The Technical Committee would like some more time to consider this approach. Also, to get some feedback from the Board on how the rolling average and confidence interval approaches would align with their management goals for the stock. With that I can take any questions.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Questions for Angela? I don't see any. Jay.

DR. McNAMEE: Yes, I hesitated raising my hand, because I'm not sure that this is an actual question. But I'll go for it anyways. Thank you for this work, it was really informative. I always find that interesting, so we have this approach, averaging approach that is meant to account, sort of like a hat to account for the uncertainty, but kind of on its face at the hat. Let's get refined, let's look at the confidence intervals and see how that performs, and lo and behold they kind of both work the same, you know depending on which level you take. I always kind of get a kick out of that anyways. But thank you for the work, it's good work. I agree with some of the recommendations. First, that when you do something like this you kind of have some

information, but you don't know what you're shooting for, so it's just kind of information that is hanging out there.

I think one, it's kind of like an implied metric is a notion of stability, like how many times would we have had to change. That is kind of how I viewed the information, and it looks like it's pretty much, you have to really kind of collapse in on the distribution to get it to actually react, because the confidence intervals are so large to begin with. That is useful information, and that recommendation I think is a good one from the Technical Committee as well that it depends on.

You know if you want it to be more responsive than you pick the 50 percent or somewhere between there and 80, or something like that. I guess I'm struggling. I think we should keep pursuing this. I like the approach. I'm struggling a little bit to understand how we hone in on getting the Technical Committee information that they need to be able to provide us with judgments about these different things.

You know I think it could take a bunch of different forms, like a survey of the Board, but I don't know. I think to pursue this further they need a little more guidance from the Board as to what we're looking for. Stability could be one feature, and then they would be able to tell us, okay this one provides the most stability at a 95 percent confidence interval you never change.

But that might conflict with, we also don't want to overfish, and you kind of end up doing sort of like a mini management strategy evaluation, basically is what you're doing. I know that people don't like that word, so I hesitated to use it. But we don't have to do a really complicated one, but I think to pursue this further we need to provide more guidance. I'll kind of let that float out there, and if I have any more definitive thoughts, I'll offer them, Mr. Chair.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Any other questions, comments in response to this? Go ahead, Jesse.

MR. JESSE HORNSTEIN: I have a question. After we change measures for '25, we'll just have one year data to work with the following year, so whether we use the confidence interval approach or the average approach, both kind of assume that there is some length of time to look at an average or the majority of years.

When we come back next year to look at the harvest compared to the target, in the Addendum it says you can always be required to adjust measures if you are above the target. When you only have one year of data, are we still required to do that, or assuming g say it's above the target, or is that just kind of Board discretion at that time?

MS. FRANKE: Yes, thanks for that question. Just to expand on this scenario. The current specifications end in 2026, so the Board will have to consider setting specifications and recreational measures starting in '27. We'll be doing that at the end of '26, so we'll be looking back at data from 2025 prior. Since we were doing a management change in '25, we'll only have that one year of data. I think that is a question for the Board to ponder, because I'm not sure when the original FMP was developed. There was much thought about the scenario of, what if we only have one year of data, whether we're using the average approach or the confidence interval approach. I think that's a helpful thing to point out at this point, that once we get to 2026 and the Board is thinking about 2027, we're going to be in a little bit of a conundrum, because we'll only have one year of data, based on this next management change. I think that will take some future discussion of the Board to think about how we move forward for 2027.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Lynn, see if you can figure that out, go ahead and get ready. It's going to fall squarely in your lap, I'm afraid, as Chair. Yes, I'm glad you brought that up. It is something we need to be thinking about, so Jay.

DR. MCNAMEE: Emilie, can I ask you a little more about that. In that case, is the idea that the averaging approach wouldn't work but the confidence interval approach could work, because you have that in the single year, correct?

MS. FRANKE: I think theoretically, yes. But again, I think this is a scenario that maybe the original FMP didn't have the confidence interval approach, so I think just in general the scenario of only having one year of data wasn't really considered. I think it would be up to the Board to think about, you know would using the confidence interval approach for just one year, I think that could functionally work, but would the Board be comfortable with that? I think we're going to have to have some more discussion on it to see.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I think you run the possibility of the half PSEs to qualifying so much data that you don't even have anything to work with. Lynn.

MS. FEGLEY: Thanks, I appreciate the punt over there. We just had a conversation about the stock assessment, and its delay. I think somebody said, and maybe it was Joe said that the delay of the stock assessment might put us into status quo, maybe for longer than we might want to be. Maybe a lot of this comes back around to when that assessment becomes available, because if we reach '26 and we're trying to set the specifications and maybe what these force us into, we don't have any stock assessment.

We don't know what would drive those new specifications. It's just going to run us into extending our status quo measures for a little bit longer, until we can implement either a PSE technique that works, or a rolling average technique, and also work on getting those assessments. I don't know if I'm making sense, but it seems like there is some interplay here that at the end of the day we may find ourselves just in protracted status quo, while

we get our ducks in a row with the assessment and the confidence intervals or PSE approach, or rolling average approach, sorry.

CHAIR WOODWARD: I think that is an accurate characterization of the future is that we've got a lot of balls in the air that all need to come to hand before we truly make the kind of informed decision that we need to make. Lynn.

MS. FEGLEY: I guess my follow up to that, sort of the conclusion I never reached was, maybe when we have more information on when the assessment is coming through, maybe that is the time when the Board could make a decision how it wants to go forward, and potentially, so if we understand that the assessment is going to be delayed until 2028, the Board can take action to extend our specifications until that time. That was kind of a conclusion I was aiming for, but never got to.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Right, we're certainly not at a decision point now, you know. We've got things that have to play out before we know enough to make an informed decision. Again, thanks, Angela, for that. I do think we continue to need to be thinking about, you know if we're going to use this confidence interval approach, where do we want those boundaries to be set, you know in terms of our comfort?

Because it all comes back to the old perennial balance of risk versus uncertainty, like it always seems to do. Cobia is certainly a poster child for the challenges of that, you know pulse fishery, catch estimates with high uncertainty. Any further discussion on that topic? If not, we'll move along.

#### **UPDATE FROM SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL ON MACKEREL PORT MEETINGS**

CHAIR WOODWARD: I'm going to call on John Carmichael for an update on our Atlantic Coast Mackerel Port Meetings.

MR. CARMICHAEL: We continue with the Port Meetings; we've held them recently in Florida. We

had them in South Carolina as well, which were rescheduled. A pretty good turnout in the more southern ones in Florida. I think North Carolina is probably still leading, in terms of the number of fishermen who showed up.

The last round is coming up in the Mid-Atlantic, which will be November 18th in Virginia Beach. The 19th in White Stone, the 20th in Ocean City, and 21st in Manahawkin. We really appreciate the efforts everybody has put into through this, as we work through these Port Meetings to help spread the word, encouraging fishermen to get there and get this input.

It's been really great input through the process that's for sure. There is a lot of interest by those fishermen, they are very engaged. The next steps are we're planning to review the report from all the meetings at the March, 2025 Council meeting. Then at that point the intent is to begin an amendment, which would look at the fishery really comprehensively. Looking at the goals and objectives of the amendment, and looking at catch limits for Spanish mackerel, the other management changes that might be needed.

I'm expecting there will be a Mackerel Cobia AP meeting in the spring to review the report, and at some point, we may want to consider if there is value in getting the Council's advisors and the ASMFC advisors together, and somehow to provide input on this and go through the amendment. That is something we can certainly work out at the staff level. Information on all these is on the Council website, for those that are interested in following along, and hopefully ascending, so I know we're working on getting folks there.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Thanks, John, any questions for John on that? Emilie.

MS. FRANKE: Yes, just for states in the Mid-Atlantic. I'll be reaching out next week, the Council staff passed along some outreach materials that I will share with you.

CHAIR WOODWARD: Once the Council initiates action on this Addendum, then we'll have to start contemplating what our response is going to be to synchronize our activities. Just as a reminder, we've got a stock status determination and some catch level advice that is going to require some potentially unpleasant changes, so that is something we're going to be facing in the not-too-distant future.

### ADJOURNMENT

Thank you, John, and thanks to everybody at the states, and at the Commission and the Council that have put these meetings together. I attended one in Coastal Georgia, and it was an interesting opportunity to get people to just talk about their perspective on things. There were some common themes that emerged out of it that I think are pretty illuminating, in terms of how people perceive the abundance of fish and changes in the ecosystem. At this point, is there any Other Business to come before the Pelagics Board? Seeing none; we'll adjourn.

(Whereupon the meeting adjourned at 1:50 p.m. on October 22, 2024)