

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

**May 9, 2005
Alexandria, VA**

Approved August 17, 2005

ATTENDANCE

Board Members

Damon Tatem, NC, Gov. Appte
Louis Daniel, NC DMF
David Cupka, SC DNR
Dale Theiling, SC DNR
Spud Woodward, GA DNR, Chair

John Duren, GA Gov. Appte.
Gil McRae, FL FWC
Jim Weaver, NOAA Fisheries
Wilson Laney, USFWS

Ad hoc State Representatives

Roy Miller, DE Div Fish and Wildlife
Tom Fote, NJ Gov. Appte.
Ed Goldman, NJ Leg Appte. Proxy for Assemblyman

Robert Smith
Jack Travelstead, VMRC

Ex-Officio Members

William Windley Jr., Atlantic Croaker Advisory Panel Chair

Staff

Vince O'Shea
Nancy Wallace

Ruth Christiansen
Bob Beal

Guests

Michael Doebely, RFA
Dick Brame, CCA
Kelly V. Place, VA Leg. proxy
Michael Kaufmann, Pa Fish and Boat Comm.

Anne Lange, NMFS
Preston Pate, NCDMF
Mike Howard, ASMFC

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SUMMARY OF MOTIONS

There were no motions made at this meeting.

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

**Radisson Hotel Old Towne
Alexandria, Virginia**

May 9, 2005

The meeting of the South Atlantic State-Federal Fisheries Management Board of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission convened in the Presidential Ballroom of the Radisson Hotel Old Towne, Alexandria, Virginia, on Monday, May 9, 2005, and was called to order at 2:00 o'clock, a.m., by Chairman Spud Woodward.

WELCOME

CHAIRMAN SPUD WOODWARD: All right, we'll go ahead and get started. For those of you who might not know me, I'm Spud Woodward. I'm the chair of the South Atlantic Board. I want to welcome you all to the spring meeting.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND
PROCEEDINGS**

We'll move right into our agenda. You've had that. Are there any additions to the agenda? If not we'll consider that approved. Each of you should have had a copy of the proceedings for a while. Any additions or edits to the proceedings? If not without opposition we'll consider that approved as well.

PUBLIC COMMENT

We'll go ahead and move into the public comment period. Do we have anyone here from the public that would like to comment about any of the activities of the South Atlantic Board? Doesn't look like it so we'll move on right past that and I'll turn it over to Nancy Wallace so she can get us up to speed on Amendment 1 to the Croaker Plan.

**REVIEW DRAFT AMENDMENT 1 TO THE
ATLANTIC CROAKER FMP**

MS. NANCY E. WALLACE: Okay, I hope all of you have had a chance to just glance over the

draft croaker amendment that was on the CD. As you may have noticed I put a memo on there that said that this is not the final copy that will be going to public comment.

Unfortunately the amendment is not complete yet. We're still waiting on the habitat section and the endangered species section as well as the PRT is still working on the background section.

But I'm hoping that I can go through kind of the meat of the amendment right now and all of the options that are going to be included. And if you have any feedback or want to change anything, include anything, now is a good time so when we come back in August it will be more ready to go out for public comment. So with that I'll move into the amendment.

So, as I said the introduction and background information -- I'm just going to step through each section -- that will be completed by July 2005 and will be on the CD-Rom for the next board meeting.

The goals and objectives, I'd like everybody to pay attention to this slide because staff and the PDT developed this goal of the croaker plan kind of working off the 1987 plan and updating it. But if you have any changes or revisions please let me know.

So what we've come up with is the goal of Amendment 1 is to utilize interstate management to perpetuate the self-sustainable Atlantic croaker resource throughout its range and generate the greatest economic and social benefits from its commercial and recreational harvest and utilization over time.

That's what staff and the plan development team have come up with but we'd be happy to revise it. The goals and objectives -- this went out in the public information document -- the objectives of the amendment are to manage the fishing mortality rates to provide adequate spawning potential to sustain long-term abundance of the populations, to manage the stocks to maintain spawning stock biomass above the target biomass levels and restrict fishing mortality below the threshold.

Number 3 is to develop a management program for restoring and maintaining essential croaker habitat. And Number 4 is to develop research priorities that will further refine the management program to maximize the biological, social and economic benefits derived from the population.

Continuing on in Section 2 we move into the management area section. Right now as you may remember the stock assessment for Atlantic croaker is broken up into a South Atlantic and a Mid-Atlantic region so we said the entire coast distribution of the resource from Florida through New Jersey will be the management area.

The question for the first issue on this document is should we be managing regionally or coast-wide management? So the first options for public comment are: Option 1 is to go with a coast-wide management, Option 2 is a regional management. So we'll see what the public has to say about that.

The second part of Section 2 is Section 2.5, the definition of overfished and overfishing. The technical committee has come up with the recommended thresholds and targets that are up on the screen.

FMSY at 0.39 would be the F threshold. F target is .75 of FMSY which would be .29. The biomass target is 28,932 metric tons and the threshold is 20,252 metric tons. I don't have a graph in here but hopefully you've all seen in the document from where we're at.

The current stage is that we are not overfished and overfishing is not occurring. We're actually well above the spawning stock biomass and well below fishing mortality. So the issue for that section is to choose a fishing mortality rate.

The first option is status quo, no fishing mortality target or threshold. And the second option would be to use the technical committee's recommended F target and F threshold. Issue 2 is to choose a spawning stock biomass target and the same options are included, either status quo or to use the technical committee's recommended SSB target and threshold.

Moving on to Section 3, the monitoring program, what we did in the document I think at Dr. Daniel's suggestion last time was to include all of different states and their regulations that have an indirect effect on Atlantic croaker so mostly the weakfish regulations for each state.

So you can see in the document that what the PDT did was go through and put in each state and how that different mesh sizes and seasons for weakfish and the fact that that might be affecting Atlantic croaker.

The one thing that's not in the document and I'm not exactly sure how to get in there is what affect those

regulations are having on croaker, so it's just something to think about. The technical committee hasn't reviewed what each state is doing for weakfish and how that may affect croaker.

But we're assuming that, you know, if you have a larger mesh size that will allow more escapement for croaker and the different BRDs in each state for the state regulations, so that's the first part of that section.

But there is a lack of data in the South Atlantic region to determine the stock status of Atlantic croaker. And one thing I'd like the board to discuss is should monitoring programs be implemented to address this. We have stock status for the Mid-Atlantic region but not the South Atlantic region. How do we get at that?

The third part is the monitoring program and the habitat program. We've contracted with someone at the University of Maryland who also works for the Maryland DNR and she is going to be completing the habitat section by July 2005.

Section 4, actually this is what I just went through -- I skipped ahead -- but the state management measures for other species that have an indirect effect are included in that section.

Moving into the recreational fisheries management measures, the PDT came up with a couple of options and again this is for the board's discretion if they want these included or not included to go out to public comment, which we can finalize in August.

Option 1 is status quo which means no coast-wide recreational fishing management measures. Option 2 is no relaxation of current regulations without prior approval from the South Atlantic Board. And Option 3 would be to implement appropriate bag and size limits for Atlantic croaker.

Section 4.2 are the commercial fisheries management measures. These are the same as the recreational options. Option 1 is status quo. Again that means no coast-wide commercial fisheries management measures.

Option 2 would be no relaxation of current regulations without prior approval from the South Atlantic Board. And Option 3 would be to establish coast-wide standards. The next part of Section 4 is to look at the adaptive management. These could be incorporated if we go above the F target or threshold or if SSB falls below the target or threshold. And I'll

just kind of go through these.

The measures that are subject to change in this amendment would be: the fishing year and/or seasons; area closures; the overfishing definition; rebuilding targets and schedules; catch controls, including bag and size limits; effort controls; reporting requirements; gear limitations; measures to reduce or monitor bycatch; observer requirements; management areas; recommendations to the Secretary for complementary actions in federal jurisdictions; research or monitoring requirements; maintenance of stock structure; stock enhancement protocols; and any other management measure currently included in Amendment 1.

This gives us the toolbox, basically if something were to happen with the croaker stock that we could through an addendum go through any of these management measures. The next section is 5.0.

Again the monitoring requirements would be the only thing to discuss at this point and we want to know if we should have some sort of fishery independent surveys for croaker to get at this South Atlantic stock status.

The next section is Section 6.0, management and research needs. The management and research needs that are included in the document right now are from the latest stock assessment for croaker and from the annual FMP reviews that the PRT puts together.

And the last section in the document is the protected species section and the National Marine Fisheries Service is going to be taking care of that for us and that as well will be completed in July 2005.

So, I went through that very quickly I know but it's kind of just an overview of what the plan development team has put together so far for the amendment and to give you a chance to comment on anything or change anything, include anything, that we may have missed at this time.

DISCUSSION OF OPTIONS INCLUDED IN DRAFT AMENDMENT 1

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you, Nancy. Okay, the floor is open for comments. Particularly I want to hear back from you all about this concept of monitoring requirements. I know how sensitive that kind of thing can be in the fiscal environments we're living in so I'll open the floor to that. Tom.

MR. THOMAS FOTE: Yes, why do we have 1, 2 and 3 since we have no regulations commercially and recreationally? Why do we have to get approval to relax regulations if we don't have any?

MS. WALLACE: Certain states do have regulations. I know Maryland, for instance, has a bag and size limit for the recreational fishery. So one of the options would be that we're not going to institute any coast-wide measures but you know if Maryland was going to go back and get more relaxed, that's what that option means.

MR. FOTE: I'm uncomfortable with that one since we always have basically never penalized a state for being more conservative so why if they're being more conservative just because they feel that way, why should they penalize and make them do something that none of us would have to do because we have no regulations in place?

So, I mean, I'd just as soon see 1 and 2 and not that option in there since I know New Jersey has no regulations both commercially or recreationally and I don't think a lot of the other states do, either, and I don't want to penalize Maryland for being more conservative.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Any comments on that? Any feelings, opinions? Is it the sense of the committee to strike that? I see some nodding of heads. Any shaking of heads in the opposite direction? Jack.

MR. JACK TRAVELSTEAD: What page are we on? I'm lost. (Laughter)

MS. WALLACE: Page 14.

MR. TRAVELSTEAD: Page 14. And Tom's recommendation was to eliminate Number 3?

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Number 2.

MR. TRAVELSTEAD: Number 2. I would agree with that. I mean given the current status of the stock and how healthy it is why not provide flexibility to the states to do what they think they have to do or otherwise.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Okay, anybody against deleting that option? Anything else on the options that are in there? And if not let's talk a little bit about this monitoring. Vince.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JOHN V. O'SHEA: I don't want to jump ahead of you, Mr. Chairman. You're going to keep this whole issue open after you talk about the monitoring requirements or would that be the last thing you talk about?

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: I was kind of going to wait and hold that until the last, the monitoring requirements, because I figure that's probably the thing that's the stickiest wicket that we've got to talk about.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR O'SHEA: Okay, then if you will, Nancy probably doesn't want to hear me say this but when I was going down the list I didn't see an issue regarding, I'm not sure how we phrased it but it's late compliance with the fishery management plan.

And I think a decision was made at the Policy Board as FMPs came online we were going to put in provisions to deal with penalties or responses for late compliance. And I think that the reason we haven't gone forward with that is we were going to do it with the Summer Flounder Plan and we've had some problems teasing that out. But I'm just wondering if it would be appropriate to add a placeholder.

And this is a situation where states don't implement until towards the end of the season or very late and it falls between the crack of a non-compliance finding and you know the actual fishing season and we were trying to get away from that. And maybe some of the other board members around the table might recall what the issue has been with summer flounder.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Well, I mean if this is something that we're doing in our other plans we certainly ought to be consistent I would think.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR O'SHEA: Well, to follow up, Mr. Chairman, maybe to put Nancy on the spot for a second, I suspect the reason that wasn't put in here is because we hadn't come up with sort of the way to deal with this in summer flounder and since we didn't have that model we can't really put it into other plans. Is that the reason why you don't have it here?

MS. WALLACE: Well, I'm not sure. I think that one of the reasons we don't have it in here right now is we don't have a lot of compliance criteria in this public information document to go out so if there is not going to be a lot to actually

implement we hadn't really thought about penalties or delays yet.

I think that's certainly something that we could put in, especially considering the adaptive management if we needed to do something later what would be the penalties. I think that definitely is something that we can put in the plan or in for public comment.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR O'SHEA: Right, just to follow up, Mr. Chairman, I think the sense of the Policy Board was that eventually where we want to be with all our plans is we have those features built into the plan to improve compliance with the plan so thank you.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: I would agree with that. I mean the least amount of ambiguity you have when the issue arises the more easily it is resolved. So anybody have any concerns about that, putting a placeholder in there until we can finalize? Okay, monitoring. Louis.

DR. LOUIS DANIEL: Not a question on monitoring but before we get to the end here I just want to bring up this Issue 1 on Page 4, the coast-wide versus regional management and was wondering if anybody could provide any insight into why the split area was chosen the way it was.

I mean historically we've looked at north and south of Hatteras and for whatever reason this one is broken out North Carolina/South Carolina for basically a Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic component.

MS. WALLACE: Well, I wish that we had a representative from the technical committee here but I can try to answer this question. When the stock assessment was being completed I know that the stock assessment subcommittee felt that there were some definite differences between the stocks north of Hatteras and south of Hatteras.

And I believe the reason they split it at North Carolina/South Carolina, because that's the landings data that we had and were able to incorporate into the model because things were broken out by state and they felt that for management purposes it might be the easiest way to go.

I know this was a sticking point at the peer review as well but the peer review panel did sign off on it finally that that was a reasonable way to divide up the stocks. And the reason being is we don't have enough data I guess from the South Atlantic region to

determine the stock status but they felt they had a pretty good feeling on what was happening in the Mid-Atlantic. And I think that's why, because of the landings data, why it was split North Carolina/South Carolina.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Any comments about that? I mean without Rob here or someone from the technical committee I hesitate to get down into the weeds on this but if you feel strongly that there needs to be another option in there I mean this is the time to do it.

DR. DANIEL: I just bring it up because it could potentially cause us problems in the future. I mean if we have data in the South Atlantic it's in the area of North Carolina south of Hatteras. I mean that's where the data is. And to lump that area into the Mid-Atlantic is an arbitrary split. And it could end up creating problems.

I recognize that the peer review signed off on it as being the best we could do at the time but I just think it needs to be recognized that without, just picking that arbitrary geography could create a real problem for us.

And I think that if you were to redo the assessment south of Hatteras I think it would probably provide us with a very different look at what the population looks like.

I'm comfortable going forward with the way that it is now but I just think we need to be prepared and it might not be a bad idea to have that additional option being the Hatteras Break which has been typically the way we've done this in all of our plans where we have a north/south split.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Any other feelings about that? Did I see a hand back there in the audience? Mr. Brame, can approach the microphone please, sir. Make sure you'll identify yourself, although we all know you.

MR. DICK BRAME: Jack has got the stopwatch on me. I'm Dick Brame with the Coastal Conservation Association. We would support what Louis is talking about. We believe that biologically at the area where Hatteras, south of Hatteras should be lumped in the South Atlantic.

I understand the technical committee's problem with the data, but I believe the data can be teased out. I know the MRFSS data can be done inside North Carolina and south of Hatteras. Perhaps you could

do the same with the commercial data; I'm not nearly as confident.

But clearly south of Hatteras this stock is no where near as robust as it is north of Hatteras. And it used to be very, very robust. And I don't think we will ever determine what the problems are if we lump all of North Carolina into the Mid-Atlantic because we believe North Carolina is part of the problem and would be part of the solution. And in order to do that we would support an option that would keep the dividing line at Hatteras.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you, Dick. Nancy.

MS. WALLACE: Just a question for the board and maybe to think about for the August meeting is, if we do go out to public comment and we hear, you know, "we would like the croaker stock to be managed on a regional basis" I'm just curious of how the board thinks that the stock should be managed in the southern region or south of Hatteras or as it is broken up now when we don't have any stock status. I don't know the answer to that and then if you have any feedback for me of things that should be included in the document please let me know.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Okay, unless I hear otherwise I'll give staff the discretion to come up with an option that characterizes a split based on Hatteras north and Hatteras south. Okay, back around to the monitoring. We keep dodging that bullet but we can't dodge it forever. I'd like to hear some discussion from the board about that.

DR. DANIEL: What page is that?

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Section 3.9, which is what page?

MS. WALLACE: I'm sorry, Section 3, page 9.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Section 3, pages 9 and 10, Louis. I mean we all know that we're not going to change the situation unless we acquire more data but then we also know what we deal with on our spreadsheets when we go back home and look at the numbers. The collective wisdom of this board, surely somebody has a way to extricate us out of this situation. David.

MR. DAVID CUPKA: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know this was one of the species that originally we intended to cover with SEAMAP and to the best of my knowledge it's still one that we're collecting data

on.

Of course we've had to cut back on the SEAMAP program over the years as funding has been cut but I think the outlook has improved somewhat and maybe Dale Thieling who serves on our SEAMAP Board here can shed some insight on what the prognosis for that might be of possibly beefing up SEAMAP to do a little better job on collecting some of this finfish data.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Dale, will you indulge us.

MR. DALE THIELING: SEAMAP needs to be expanded of course. I believe we all accept that fact. The number of trawl samples taken by SEAMAP which is conducted by South Carolina Natural Resources has been reduced in recent years because the funding just doesn't allow for the number of trawl trips in a year's time. So expansion of SEAMAP would certainly help with croaker and other coastal finfish species.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Okay, thank you, Dale. It's kind of a tough situation we're facing here. You know, what do you do? And, again, without having the technical committee here to help us with some specifics I can see us kind of wallowing around on this for a while. David.

MR. CUPKA: Well, maybe you know if we need some input from that group maybe we can ask them to look at making some recommendations on what it would take to get data. We've all alluded to the fact that we don't have very good data south of or in the southern part of the range.

And maybe they could develop some options for us as to what it would take to start getting some of that data and then that would be a first step in seeing what the needs would be to collect that data. So that may be something you would want to task the technical committee with, taking a look at and making some recommendations back to this board.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: All right, a good suggestion. A.C.

MR. A.C. CARPENTER: Borrowing from the discussions of the Striped Bass Board a little bit earlier today, all of these ACCSP mandates that are just referred to in here, most of them are going to have a tremendous economic impact on the states in terms of costs.

And I think that we really ought to try to get a handle on what those costs are going to be for 5 percent at-sea observers on all of these trips and what they are going to cost us. And I know that it's in the document but it doesn't jump out at you on this one like it does on the striped bass document where it clearly said, "5 percent of all trips" as the ACCSP standard.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: That's a good point. Going back to what David said I think perhaps what we need to do to get past this point is just ask the technical committee to take the hard look and to come up with the absolute specifics of what they think needs to be done with some associated cost estimates so that we would have a better basis for discussion in this because I know just speaking for myself I certainly don't want to see anything put in there that's going to create an unrealistic burden on any of us. I mean we've got enough of that to deal with now. So I think that -- Vince.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR O'SHEA: Yes, thanks, Mr. Chairman. I think the idea to engage the technical committee makes a lot of sense. And I think it also makes sense to, would also make sense that they prioritize.

You all ought to have an understanding of what is the next most important piece of information that they all need, what's the cost associated with it and if they listed it down sort of in a priority level.

I think one of the problems on some of this stuff is that, yes, it would be great to collect all this stuff but what's the most important, given limited resources what's the most important thing and get their advice on that.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you. Yes, I think they key is to find out what is feasible that could actually enable us to do a southern region assessment, if that is feasible. And it may be that we get such a hard dose of reality that we all just drop back and go, well, that's not going to happen for this species because we've got all these other things but at least we'll know that. And right now we don't have enough information so if everybody is comfortable with that we can move on and task the technical committee with that. Okay. Nancy.

MS. WALLACE: I was just going to ask if there is anything else in the document that you feel has been left out or you want included and if you don't know today if you have a chance to look at it in more depth please just contact me and the PDT can

work that in and we can review it again in August.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Okay, Vince.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR O'SHEA: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to put what might be a related issue on the table and perhaps folks might want to think about but I've noticed on some of our other species that the way we have the biological collection, for example, set up it's like a year after the fact that a state might come in and report whether or not it was able to collect those samples.

And in a couple of instances it has put the board sort of in an awkward position on how to respond because the year has already gone. And as I have been listening to those discussions it occurs to me that it might have been more helpful to have had a process that at the beginning of the season, the beginning of the year, there was a requirement for the states to come in and commit to do that collection early on when you still had the year left to sort of manage the outcome.

But if you wait until the end of the year and say, "Did you collect the samples" and they said, "Well, no, we didn't get the money," it seems to me that it may be more useful to have that discussion up front before the year starts and to get a sense from the states -- and I don't know if we can build that into the plan or if there is a way to build that into the plan.

And obviously this is a brand-new species to be managing but I think it's something -- well, let me try to say it this way, finding out two years ago that a state didn't collect the samples doesn't help anybody and I think we need to find a way to break out of that system because the bottom line is to get the samples. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Vince, you know how we are about commitment. In serious, I understand what you're saying and it's certainly a valid point and something that we need to consider. I guess whenever our technical committee is laying out a plan that's one of the things that we need to direct them to do is to look at the timeliness of the data and when it would be brought back to bear on the decision making process. Louis.

DR. DANIEL: Well, this is a problem we're dealing with right now with weakfish where some states we didn't get any length and age information on it. I really don't know how to deal with it. I mean we get this information from the states.

And if we don't have enough information coast-wide we have to expand the data we have for a coast-wide estimate and recognize that that's not the best case scenario, that we would certainly like to have that information from everywhere and that when we have to try to expand the ages collected in North Carolina and Virginia for the entire coast then there are problems inherent in that, especially when we're potentially looking at two separate stocks of fish.

So, I think when you commit to it, you have to commit to do it and you have to get out and do it by any means necessary. The problem with doing it early in the year is some of these fisheries are so seasonal that you may not know until October that you can't collect the fish.

If every state was like North Carolina where the bulk of our fishery is in January and February, we're going to know by the end of February whether we collected the necessary data. So it's a problem that we have commission-wide and plan-wide and I don't know that there is an easy solution to fixing that problem.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: I think if there was an easy solution we would have already done it. I mean that's usually the case. But, anyway, your point is well taken. And I think as we move forward we need to try to wrestle with that.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR O'SHEA: Well, I mean one of the, hopefully the obvious thing is if a state couldn't commit to -- this sounds draconian but if a state couldn't commit to the samples I think there is a legitimate question of why you're opening your fishery.

And if folks knew that that's what the trade-off was then maybe the funds would be forthcoming, if not directly out of the state budget then maybe from some of the user groups to say there would be a direct benefit to the people using the resource.

That type of thinking is I think what we may need to bring to bear on some of these problems where the states are having trouble coming up with the money to do this work. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: I want to go back to Wilson and then I'll move to Tom and to Roy.

MR. WILSON LANNEY: Nancy, who are the point people for the habitat section and the

protected species section?

MS. WALLACE: We've contracted with Tammy Miller in Maryland. She is a University of Maryland student but also working at the Maryland DNR. Elizabeth Griffin from ASMFC works on the protected species and she's working with the National Marine Fisheries Service for the protected species part of it. And I don't know who that point person is.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Well, I knew Vince's comments would evoke some response. Tom.

MR. FOTE: I understand what Vince is saying and I appreciate it but Vince is also not in the position some of the states are right now. Instead of looking at budget increases or more money from the feds we are looking at just the opposite and we are looking at if some solutions are made in New Jersey we're going to lay off 55 employees of the Division of Fish and Wildlife.

Now hopefully that won't happen but I think most states are in the same sort of situation. I was concerned when we did weakfish that we didn't have enough samples. And I don't know if we corrected the problem or not and Bruce isn't here to basically answer the question.

But we did get samples and it was done by volunteers. But even to do it by volunteers you've got to contact the people and the states are so short staffed right now that that's even a problem working up somebody just to do that type of work.

You know we haven't seen an increase where the commission and staff has seen an increase in the last 15 years numerous times. We have seen one steady decrease after another and plans have basically required more and more monitoring and more and more management with less and less personnel.

And it's no excuse but that's just the facts of life and I mean looking at the budget deficits in most of the states, it's a real battle. And there has to be some understanding there.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you. And I think that that, what we're dealing with speaks volumes for the need to truly prioritize what is important and what is not important.

I mean we all get caught in the routine of certain types of data collection processes that we've done for

a long time. We're comfortable. We've got the infrastructure. But sometimes those processes don't necessarily bring the kinds of information to bear on decision making like we wish. But, Roy, you were next.

MR. ROY MILLER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, just to expand on what Tom and Vince were talking about. I think perhaps as the monitoring requirements for these plans continue to escalate and the funds either decrease or remain stagnant I think the states collectively need a new funding mechanism in order to meet these monitoring requirements.

It has become apparent to me that if we were to expand our sampling of croaker landings, for instance commercial landings, I'm going to need a new body to take care of the needs of croaker.

We're barely meeting our needs with weakfish and striped bass and some other species. But we just cannot keep adding on jobs with the same folks or even fewer in some cases.

And maybe the mechanism -- and I realize that not everyone probably participated in the e-mails that went back and forth from Eric Smith and Mark Gibson and others concerning Mid-Atlantic regional council funding to the states but something innovative like that may be what is necessary in order to meet these compliance requirements. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Yes, there's many mouths to be fed and not a lot to go around and that never seems to change so I think we'll task the technical committee to give us a prioritized you know hard look with some cost estimates and then we'll try to weave that into this plan as best we can.

And then we're going to have to be very judicious about how we apply their recommendations because I, like all of you, are in a situation where you know we're stretched pretty thin and I don't see that changing any time soon. Bill, I wanted to give you a chance. We've got Bill Windley here, the chair of our AP. Is there anything you'd like to say about the document so far?

MR. WILLIAM WINDLEY JR.: I guess pretty much my initial report covered where the AP was. We're concerned about the same thing. Well, in every AP that I've attended they're concerned about the same thing.

We're looking at more and more weight put on the shoulders of the state, weight that we need to get.

Something needs to be accomplished for us to really manage the fisheries and, you know, every year we look back and say we don't have data for last year. So that really was one of our biggest primary concerns and especially in the South Atlantic region.

ACFCMA ENHANCEMENT- RED DRUM SURVEYS

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you, Bill. And thank you for the service you give us. We do appreciate it. If there is nothing else on Amendment 1 we'll move on to the next agenda item.

And Bob has made a timely appearance and he can explain to us all of the machinations and mysteries surrounding this ACFCMA enhancement which I think is a classic example of we're all tickled to death to get this extra money and now we're figuring out how in the world we're going to use it and how in the world we're actually going to get it to the people that need to use it. But I'm sure Bob is going to have a clear, concise explanation of how all that is going to work out.

MR. ROBERT E. BEAL: I wish I could give you a clear or concise answer. As you all know the Atlantic Coastal or ACFCMA Grant was increased by \$2 million this year for the states to address five areas of concern that we let Congress know we could affect if we received some additional funding.

One of the areas was red drum management or red drum stock assessment in particular. And there was \$225,000 set aside for red drum activity in the spending plan that was approved by the Executive Committee of the additional funding that was appropriated by Congress.

And what we've done so far is the states of North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia have gotten together and put together a proposal to do some additional red drum survey work.

The bulk of that funding will be used for a red drum long-line survey, about \$222,000 of it will be used for that. And about \$3,000 or so will go to Georgia for a tagging study, an angler-based tagging study, that will enhance some of their efforts that they currently have right now.

And what the plan is so far is we're going to, the way the money is going to be distributed is that the commission is going to develop a grant proposal, send that to the National Marine Fisheries Service's

Northeast Regional Office.

The regional office is going to, assuming they approve the proposal, will send the funds to the commission and then the commission will distribute the funds directly to the states.

So, once we get the money based on the proposals that we have received from the states that I mentioned earlier we will send those three states individual contracts or sub-grants to initiate the work as soon as we can.

The timeline that we're on so far is to develop the overall grant proposal and get that to the Northeast Regional Office by the end of June. We're moving along pretty well to deal with that.

The one hang-up that we've recently come across is the requirement to develop NEPA statements for some of these projects. I think the red drum long-line work is probably going to fall under the category of a project we have to develop a NEPA or an environmental impact statement to determine the impacts on red drum mortality.

And I think some protected resources issues may come up and those sorts of things so we're going to have to develop potentially a pretty lengthy description of exactly what this long-line survey is going to look like. But I think based on what the states have supplied to us now we can start to piece that together and get pretty close to that June 30th deadline.

The question then is how long is the Northeast Regional Office going to take to get the money down to the commission and when can the states start implementing the study. That's something we're not exactly sure.

It's going to take at least you know a couple of months to review the entire grant proposal because this proposal won't just be for red drum, it will be for lobster work and near shore trawl surveys and the other areas that we have proposed so it's going to be pretty lengthy.

So, that's where we are. The plan is coming together. We're pulling it together. The NEPA statements may take a little bit longer but the state work that needed to be done to develop the study design has been taken care of. Now it's more of an administrative, bureaucratic type effort that has to take place to get the money out to the states.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you, Bob. Since I've got control of the microphone I'm about to get up on my soapbox here a little bit. We were fortunate enough to get this money. And needless to say the money needs to be moved into the hands of the people who are going to do something with it as expeditiously as possible.

And that's one of the things, that I hope each of you will do what you can to help shepherd this along because it's going to be very embarrassing for us to have received this money and miss a sampling season because we could not figure out how to get through our own bureaucratic entanglements and get it there.

And I'm very concerned that that's going to happen because we are looking at the need to start this long-line sampling to make it truly effective early autumn, mid-autumn at the latest. So, I hope that we can get this through this.

And this NEPA evaluation kind of probably gives me more heartburn than anything else. But I realize we've got to do it. But we'll keep your fingers crossed that we can get this done in the amount of time so that we can have a favorable report back to Congress next year that we actually used this money for what we said we were going to use it for in a timely manner and it's not hidden in somebody's cigar box somewhere when it should have been used. So, Bob.

MR. BEAL: Yes, just on the NEPA point. If anyone here knows of a NEPA statement, environmental assessment type statement that has been developed for a comparable long-line study that we can you know borrow from liberally to develop the statement or the NEPA statement for this study I think that would speed things up quite a bit, the impacts on other fisheries and mortality on striped bass (Laughter) I'm sorry, on red drum, all those things. If we can steal it it's a lot easier than creating it ourselves is probably the most blunt way to put it.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Yes, good point. Mr. Mahood, welcome back to the South Atlantic Board. Good to see you.

DR. ROBERT K. MAHOOD: Thanks, Spud. I just had a question for Bob. I'm a little unclear why it's going to take so long. I understand what you're saying is when you put in the grant proposal to the Northeast Region then they're going to require an EIS for that study, for that grant?

MR. BEAL: Well, not a full-blown EIS but

a statement, you know an environmental assessment detailing the impacts that that study may have.

DR. MAHOOD: But that should take a day. I mean they do the same thing to our grants in the southeast but it doesn't take a long period of time. Somebody just needs to make that determination.

And I would think a study where you're gathering data to protect a resource shouldn't have any significant impacts and that decision can be made by somebody in a position to make it in, you know, one day. I mean that's not a drawn out, month-long or two-month long process. Maybe you ought to think about running it through the Southeast Region instead of the Northeast Region. (Laughter)

MR. BEAL: Sounds good to me at this point. You know the list of questions that we have received from the Northeast Regional Office on things that we're going to have to address is going to take more than a day to put together so maybe we can talk after the meeting, Bob, and we can see how you guys do it and see if there is a way to speed it up.

The less bureaucratic documentation that we have to do obviously we're in favor of it. And the quicker we can get the money out to the states the quicker we can let Congress know we are able to do something important with that money.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Okay, Anne, come up to a microphone, please. And Anne is going to tell us how she is going to move this right along.

MS. ANNE LANGE: Anne Lange, National Marine Fisheries Service. I just wanted to clarify we will be trying to move things along as quickly as possible. The month to two month timeframe or longer is not the NEPA part of it. It's the entire grant process.

The Northeast Region has not yet received the proposals for any of the grant work for this \$2 million add-on. As I'm sure you're all aware once you receive the grant proposal it has to be put together.

The package has to be put together in the region and submitted to NOAA Grants in Downtown D.C. and they're the ones that do the whole review process in the NOAA system and that's where the timeframe comes in.

The NEPA part of it is a little unclear in that the commission has not had to do NEPA contracts or

NEPA documents before. The states are a little more familiar with it and the council certainly but as far as commission staff the only grants they've worked with are administrative grants so there has been no field work involved.

So this is a new process for the commission so they're just getting up to speed on what's needed for categorical exclusions as well as EAs or EISs. And you're right, Bob, these will be EAs or categorical exclusions.

But there are just pieces of information that need to be compiled to complete the packages. It's not the NEPA that's going to take a couple of months, it's the grant review in downtown for NOAA. And we are working and the region is working closely with Bob to try to make sure the packages are complete as quickly as possible.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you, Anne. Vince.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR O'SHEA: Two points, the first being one thing that might be on our side here given Anne's comments about how hard the service is going to work on this for us is that I'm assuming that when the sort of "normal," if you will, '05 money got poured into the hopper that jammed up the grants process.

So ever since the budget was signed the grants people have been scurrying around and at some point that stuff gets pushed out and that hopefully as you get toward the middle or the end of the year they may not have all of that stuff in front of them and may be able to work this a little bit quicker.

But the second issue was, we've sort of made up a list of what we thought would be excluded and what would need to fall under NEPA and we sent it up to the Northeast Grants Office and I wasn't sure what the answer was that we got on any feedback on that.

MR. BEAL: There is more or less agreement that the Georgia tagging work could be categorically excluded from a NEPA statement. They asked for some more details on sampling area and time of year and those sorts of things on the long line survey. And you know once they get that they can determine what sort of impact statement we need to put together.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR O'SHEA: So the process of us just sending a list of things up to them and getting guidance as to what we needed to

do to comply with NEPA and get back too, what, two weeks, three weeks?

MR. BEAL: A couple of weeks, yes.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR O'SHEA: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Well, the one thing we do have in our favor is that this gear has been used for several years in South Carolina and we've got empirical data so that can be brought to bear so it's not like we're putting something in the water that has never been done before and that ought to hopefully move this thing along.

And I mean we just need to make sure we get that. And I know that was part of the discussion when we contemplated this project, is at least we had that to fall back on. But any time you use long line people start having fits so Bob.

DR. MAHOOD: Yes, I think you hit it on the head. Obviously the hang-up would be protected resources. And one thing, just make sure when you put the grant in you make it for a long enough period that if it is held up the states can still utilize the money two, even three years. I think they're actually letting us go five years now on these things.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Vince.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR O'SHEA: And I'm thinking, Mr. Chairman, with some of the other research things that are being done as I understand it if federal funds are being used for research then you have to go through this NEPA process and I'm wondering you know things that we're doing for like MARFIN for example, don't those projects need to be cleared through the NEPA process as well? They don't?

DR. MAHOOD: Yes, my understanding, Vince, if I may, Mr. Chairman, I didn't mean to jump in.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Please.

DR. MAHOOD: I think most of those projects get the categorical exclusion of which our grants do. But I think the problem now that I hear Bob talk about it, the problem with, as Spud said, long lines, there is quite a bit of impetus on interactions with marine mammals and this type of thing. And of course that's a real consideration up in the Northeast. But MARFIN, I think most of those

projects are categorical exclusions.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR O'SHEA: Well, I guess what I'm getting at is we have a whole list of projects besides the long line one and it occurred to me with you being here today -- and I'm glad that you are here, Bob -- that we ought to be looking out at as much different research things.

And, fine, if we have a list of things that are close to what we're doing and in the past those have been categorically excluded then that would be good ammunition for us to have in trying to push these through.

So I wasn't just focusing on the long line project but any background we can get on any projects that are like the ones we're trying to do that have already had a determination made. It seemed to me to be to our advantage to include that in the package and let them know that. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: And I think, and David and Dale correct me if I'm wrong but I thought that some of that early shark long lining might, was there any MARFIN money went into that way back when Glen start all that stuff? I mean did he do any MARFIN?

MR. CUPKA: Yes, I think originally. In fact I think it's still MARFIN supported because they made a report to the MARFIN conference last year so obviously he has been using MARFIN money.

One comment I wanted to make based on what Bob had said earlier, it almost sounded like, Bob, you were looking for any kind of document that would give you a format to follow to do something like that.

And I just wanted, it seems to me that recently there was a group of long liners that put a proposal in to NMFS to do some long lining work inside some closed areas to compare some things.

I know that got turned down because I think a lot of people objected to them going into those closed areas. But as far as putting together a document or something and a format and that sort of thing, that may give you some idea on what it would take to put something together to be considered. I don't know, it's something you might want to look into.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Bob Mahood, did you have a comment? Okay. Well, hopefully when we get back together in August we'll have a favorable report on how this has proceeded.

One other bit if administrative chores that have to be done is I think we're going to probably have to have an exempted fishing permit to work in the EEZ -- which we've already talked to Roy about that so I'm pretty comfortable that we won't run into any problems with that. I hope so. Any other questions about the ACFACMA supplemental red drum work? Well, we'll keep our fingers crossed and hope it works out.

PEACH STATE REDS INITIATIVE

And with that if I can cue up my Peach State Reds Initiative slide I believe we're at that point. And before we get started this is not an effort to create a minor league baseball team in Georgia. It's nothing to do with the communist party. It's all about redfish, all on that topic.

There you go, the animal in question, since we've just spent the last 20 minutes talking about it, something that is very important to us in the southeast, a species that we're concerned about.

And you can see just how concerned about it we are in Georgia when you look at the number of recreational fishing trips that target that species. It's a fairly large percentage of the total number of trips that are targeting species in Georgia.

Well, due to the efforts of the states and the commission we've gotten to the point now that we believe we have achieved our target of a 40 percent spawning potential ratio.

Of course the big unknown will be where we're going to be at in 2008, whenever we do the next assessment, given the fact that a lot of things have changed and will continue to change between the time we did that assessment and enacted those regulations in 2008.

The 21st Century has presented a pretty interesting environment for red drum management. I mean we certainly have got increasing angling pressure. That is happening throughout the southeast United States.

The redfish has sort of become the large mouth bass of saltwater fishing now. We've got three professional tournament trails, some of which are televised. It has brought notoriety and a lot of attention to the species.

A lot of people that didn't know a redfish back in the Midwest are now watching ESPN on the weekends

and seeing people target redfish so that is certainly a change. We've got more local tournaments. We've got more access to coastal waters. All these things are bringing pressure to bear.

The usual things that we're concerned about, the urbanization in the coastal zone, what that's going to mean to water quality. Something that we are growingly concerned about and that is the freshwater inflow to the estuaries and what that's going to mean to the suitability of estuaries as red drum habitat.

And then of course as this commission is wrestling with almost on a daily basis of what about the commercial harvest of prey species, ecosystem management -- what does all this, what all is going on?

If you look at our toolbox we've got the standard things we've been using for a long time. We have probably got to look at seasons in the future, what would be the value of having seasonal parameters on the harvest of fish. Most states have not gone there. It's something we're going to have to look at.

We'll have to look at of course voluntary catch and release, educating the public. In some cases prohibition of commercial harvest has been deemed to be an appropriate action and of course we'll have to look at habitat protection and restoration.

But then the one at the bottom is stock enhancement with hatchery-reared fish, something that the public quickly grasped as having a tremendous benefit, although the scientific community continues to be very polarized on the value of stocking those fish.

Well, we've watched our neighbors to the north and south dabble into the business of redfish husbandry and stock enhancement and our anglers read the magazines, read the newspapers and so they started coming to us probably as long ago as the early '90s going, "Well, why aren't you doing it? Why isn't Georgia DNR doing this?"

And we've kind of let things simmer along. About the late 1990s we decided we'd better deal with this proactively so we put together a citizen's advisory group and did our best to try to give them a crash course in red drum husbandry and bring them up to speed on what has been learned about the effects and effectiveness of stocking.

And after this group studied the issue for a year and a half and took some trips to Florida and South Carolina they came back to us with a

recommendation that they believe it has potential but they would like to see information specific to the state of Georgia.

Of course in an era where budgets are shrinking and the fundamental data needs are being neglected it's kind of hard to even contemplate going off on this course of action. But we felt that we needed to respond to our anglers because they were interested in this and tell them what it would take at least to start moving towards having an answer.

So that's where we came up with the Peach State Reds Initiative. Everything has got to have an identity. Everything has got to have, you know, a brand name so that you can market it in this world and that's what we came up with. And the goal of this initiative is pretty lofty.

And before I go any further, the activities that I'm going to describe are certainly not going to give us a definitive answer to whether hatchery-reared red drum can be used as a cost-effective or ecologically-sound fishery management tool but they will help move us down that road. And hopefully in combination with the work in the states in South Carolina and Florida hopefully we'll be able to make a better decision down the line.

It's going to be a joint venture/partnership between the Coastal Conservation Association of Georgia, South Carolina DNR, Florida FWC and our university system. And then we're going to fund it with a mixture of sport fish restoration, fishing license revenues and private contributions.

Well, what we're going to do is focus in on one estuarine system in Georgia. And this is an estuary where we have had in place a standardized monitoring program to develop a catch per unit effort index for young of year red drum.

And a little background, you've got to walk before you can run, certainly. And we told the folks in Georgia that before we could even contemplate doing anything to evaluate hatchery-reared red drum we needed better information on the trends in the wild stock.

And so the CCA Georgia, under John Duren's leadership, they went to bat, got us some supplemental state funding to help us put in place some standard entanglement gear surveys as a natural prerequisite to anything to evaluate hatchery-reared fish.

So what we're going to do is stock fish in the Warsaw estuary. The fish will be raised in South Carolina, working with the South Carolina DNR experts. And then we're going to contract with our university system to do enhanced net surveys to detect the presence of these fish in the wild population as well as do the angler surveys.

There are a variety of tasks, the first one we're in right now which is a genetic inventory of our red drum population. We're going to be relying on genetic fingerprinting as a method to detect these hatchery-reared fish in the wild population. Necessarily we needed to know about the inherent diversity of our wild population so we're working right now with South Carolina to do that.

We'll be moving into collection of adult brood fish this autumn. We're going to do a pre-stocking angler survey and we are imbedding questions about stock enhancement into a broader angler survey because we've never really done a coast-wide, saltwater angler survey in Georgia so this gave us a good reason to do that.

So we're not going to be asking questions that are specifically targeted as stock enhancement because of what Ray Rhodes calls the "mom and apple pie thing." I mean if you ask somebody about stocking fish most of them are going to say yes, thumbs up, do it.

But there is a way to craft the questions and imbed them in an angler survey instrument to try to get better and more accurate descriptive information. We've got obviously the production of the fingerlings and then the release of the fingerlings.

A key element of this initiative is going to be emphasis on evaluating the survival of those stocked fish. After we've had these fish in the system and they grow up to legal, harvestable size, we want to follow up with a post-stocking angler survey to see whether attitudes/opinions, things of that nature, have changed.

We'll go through the required analysis interpretation and then we'll bring this all back to the public at the end of this initiative to try to give the public what we have learned so that they can then either change their mind about stocking or get support for the things they've always believed.

And a parallel effort that is going to go on with this initiative is going to be working with South Carolina, hopefully with Florida, to try to look at protocols.

You know it's one thing to find out that these fish will survive and they'll grow and they'll distribute themselves but we need to make a decision about when are we going to stock these fish. And that's in a lot of ways more difficult than what we're wrestling with here.

Sort of an ancillary project that we're going to do, we've got a ten acre saltwater impoundment on Jekyll Island which is a state-owned island, a barrier island in Georgia. It's an area that gets a fair amount of fishing pressure.

And we're going to grow up probably 1,000, maybe a few more, red drum fingerlings to Phase 3 so they can be marked with internal anchor tags and release these in the saltwater impoundment for two reasons.

One is to really see if we can bolster up a fishing opportunity on this state resort island and the second is to see if possibly we can use that as kind of a grow-out facility to try to move them into the next size.

It does have a connection with the estuary and hopefully through recoveries of tagged fish we'll see whether the fish move out of that impoundment and out into the open estuary. Here is a timeline.

You can see it's going to be pretty busy but it's going to be stretching from this year all the way through 2009. And you could imagine in an environment where we like instant gratification a lot of anglers just kind of look at that and go, why in the world is it going to take so long. Why can't you just do something in a year and give us a quick answer?

Well, some of these processes, you know there is no way to speed them up. I mean you can't make the fish grow any faster either in the hatchery or in the wild so a certain amount of time has to pass before you can do it. But our goal is to have something meaningful in 2009 to bring back out to the public.

Well, what we did in 2004 is we started our red drum tissue sample collections. A very important accomplishment was a commitment from our CCA Georgia to raise at least \$75,000 of private funds to support this.

We held two public meetings to talk about the initiative and to get public feedback on the whole concept of stock enhancement, how people felt about it. It was a very good forum. It had a lot of people that had strong opinions both for and against. And we developed a logo which was the most painful part of the entire process so far was the development of

the logo.

What we're going to try to accomplish in the first six months of this year is continue our tissue sample collections. We've had one meeting already with South Carolina DNR to start developing our production work plan.

We'll meet with them again in June. We're going to develop a memorandum of understanding between Georgia DNR and the CCA formalizing the obligation for support. Obviously public awareness, we're moving forward with that.

We've briefed our legislative committees and our DNR board on this so that they're fully in the loop on that. And there is the winner of the logo contest. This thing was harder. It's amazingly difficult to come to consensus on a picture, especially when it has a fish involved.

But I want to thank Nancy Wallace. She was part of the logo team and did a yeoman's service helping us get to this so this will probably be the next thing you see on MTV and all these other big venues. (Laughter)

And as a matter of fact this will probably be the icon for the early part of the 21st Century when history is all said and done. (Laughter) So, anyway, if you've got any questions I'll be glad to try to answer them. And, John, if you've got anything you'd like to say on behalf of our CCA chapter, please do.

MR. JOHN DUREN: That's a good report you gave, Spud. And all I can say is that the CCA members in Georgia were real happy to be a part of this. And we're looking forward to working with the DNR and the university and the North and South Carolina folks as much as we can to realize the objectives.

And I would just point out one thing, that CCA is totally in agreement with the points Spud made about this is a test to see what we can learn. We're not ready to go and just start putting hatchery fish everywhere in the marsh until we do a careful evaluation of it. So we like the way it's being done and the program that Spud described.

And, Nancy, I didn't know you were involved with the logo and I apologize if the first round of criticism was too hard but I personally think that draft of the logo is great so I'm glad to see it.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you,

John. Louis.

DR. DANIEL: I guess a couple of questions, Spud. First in the beginning slide you're saying that we're at 40 percent SPR. What I think you meant is we've achieved the 40 percent escapement through Amendment 2 and we still have a ways to make it until the population is at 40 percent SPR, so just to make sure that's clear so that we're not saying that they're at 40 percent SPR. Are you all not seeing good recruitment of red drum down in Georgia?

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: No, we've seen good recruitment. This is not being driven by a crisis. It's being driven by interest in looking for another tool in the fishery management toolbox if conditions warrant.

And you know I started asking the question back to the fishing community as to when they said you need to be stocking fish and I said, "Well, why? Why do we need to be stocking fish?" And you know most folks have a difficult time articulating why they think you should, especially when fishing is good, you know as they see it.

But one of the things I heard and it's about as good a way of articulating it is I heard one of our anglers say, "We know that the change is coming, that we've got more fishing pressure and that we look to states around us and we see how restricted their limits have become. And we would like to know whether or not we can invest in a process that would enhance the wild stock and allow us to continue to have the limits that we've got into the future."

I mean that's the best way that this particular individual could explain it to me. That's what he wanted to know, is there a way to do this where it's not going to wreck the ecosystem but would allow them to continue to have the kind of catches that they've been having when everything says, well, we know where we're going, right on down, you know tighter and tighter and tighter. So this is an investment in the future and to complement what is being done in South Carolina and to some extent Florida. Pres.

MR. PRESTON PATE JR.: Thank you, Spud. You may have explained this and I missed it but as part of your evaluation of the survival and the benefits of this effort to the fishing community, are you doing a cost benefit analysis as well?

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Well, we're

going to do the best we can at that and that's always a difficult thing to do because you know getting at the benefit side of it -- the cost part is easy. You know that's going to be whatever we write.

We write a check to South Carolina DNR, we'll know what the cost is in terms of production and that sort of thing. But the benefit is going to be a little more elusive. And we have had a lot of conversations with Ray Rhodes and things like that trying to figure out how can we really get to that. But it's definitely in the forefront, it's just an elusive thing. Tom.

MR. FOTE: Well, since you mentioned ecosystem, I could see with stocking striped bass say in some areas up in the Hudson River or Chesapeake Bay there are complaints right now that all the striped bass are eating everything in the estuaries.

Are you going to have the same problem with red drum? Is there any kind of study that's going to be looking at the effects of putting that much pressure on the ecosystem with the load bearing capacity of the system?

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Well, that is an ambitious thing to try to do. We are going to have some food habits work done on the fish just to see what their prey is. I don't think that a study on the scale of time and space that really would be necessary is feasible in the context of this.

I mean to have the kinds of historical data on trends of abundance and prey items, I mean with an omnivore like red drum it can be pretty tough to figure out you know ecosystem effects from stocking fish.

MR. FOTE: Yes, I'm just thinking you're doing that pond in Jekyll Island. You probably have a base of what that pond looks like and then you could see the effects on that pond after a period of time to see if there is any effects.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: I guess when they crawl out on the grass and start eating the peanut butter sandwiches out of the picnic baskets I guess we'll know we've got a problem there won't we. (Laughter) No, I understand and that's a good point. Roy.

MR. MILLER: Spud, please don't misinterpret my comments as any criticism because it isn't intended to be but I'm just curious since these stocking initiatives have a way of, word about them

has a way of spreading beyond state boundaries and other neighboring states might be pressured or coerced into conducting similar type programs once word of these types of programs spreads north -- I'm thinking weakfish in case you haven't thought in the back of your mind -- is your intention to enhance local fisheries? Is your intention to move more fish into the harvestable slot? Or what is the intention, Spud? I'm kind of lost here.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Well, that's what this parallel effort that I referenced in terms of us trying, you know the fishery managers trying to decide what would be the goals of stocking fish.

I mean this is more about the mechanics of what do you put in, how fast does it grow, how do they distribute themselves, what happens to the animals. I don't know that this study in and of itself is necessarily going to be as informative about when should you do it and when shouldn't you do it as we all need to get to.

I mean that's always the most difficult thing of any kind of stock enhancement activity is, well, when do you do it. And we're faced with a difficult situation that you know by the time we know we've had a bad year class of red drum you can't go back and mitigate for that bad year class because nature has already, she is working on the next year class.

And you know the best I can explain it is can you put fish in the water will they grow? Will they recruit to the angler's creel in an appreciable enough number that you can make a qualitative judgment that your money has been spent wisely? And the difficulties of when do you do it and when do you not do it, I mean that's a whole other set of difficult questions to wrestle with.

MR. MILLER: If I could just editorialize a little bit, there are parallels obviously with efforts in the Mid-Atlantic region to stock striped bass. But that was, that stocking program was conducted under an era when the perception was that striped bass stocks were very low and that there had not been a dominant year class in many years.

And it was one of many things the states collectively did to arrest the decline of striped bass. Now whether that in fact was part of the equation of the stock recovery is another matter and I don't know that I have seen anyone say how much of a contributor it was to the stock recovery.

But it seems like it's not quite the same situation with

red drum. My perception is that it's not a fishery on the verge of collapsing. And that's why I was quizzing you on the purpose of the program, because programs like this are expensive and you know hopefully your technology will be exportable.

But if there is a big push for stock enhancement of marine species through stocking programs it's going to cost all of us a lot of money. That's why I'm curious. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Oh, I agree wholeheartedly. And this is a path that we have resisted walking down for a long time. But at the same time we feel like we owe it to our angling community, particularly if they're interested in supporting it, to at least conduct the science-based investigation to see what will happen with the fish when you put them in the water.

And I think we will always wrestle with these questions of, you know, when is the right time to do it and what ultimately do you want to achieve. And I know in other states like Florida their goal has been to increase angler catch per unit effort by a defined amount and so that they use that as the measuring stick.

And I have cautioned our anglers and supporters of this to not have a predetermined outcome. You know this is not about going in to stocking fish as a standard operating practice for fishery management.

It's about having another tool that can go into the toolbox if we were to be hit with two or three winter freezes or something where we suspect that the wild fish reproductive success was poor. Then we could possibly come in and provide that little boost or go into a localized area that for whatever reason may not have good nursery habitat function and maybe jump over that bottleneck and provide a fishing opportunity.

So there is a lot of different ways to get at it. And I know this, the technical committee has wrestled with this and when I was chair of it was still very divided about whether to do this or not do it.

Any other questions? I like those questions. Those are good questions. Those are the kinds of things we need to be thinking about. Other business. I have one item that I wanted to bring up at the Executive Director's request and that is you are all aware that we -- we collectively being the commission -- are a signatory on the MOU to the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership.

And a staff member with the Fish and Wildlife Service has been acting as the interim coordinator for that body for the last I guess 12 to 18 months. And there has been a move through the membership of the SARP to raise enough money to actually hire a full-time coordinator.

And Vince was caught by surprise when he got an e-mail that laid out a spreadsheet of who had been invoiced for their contribution to the SARP coordinator fund. And I just wanted to clarify what is going on there.

That whole effort originated from the state directors, most of them being the freshwater folks, getting together at the Southeastern meeting and deciding that they wanted to commit some money to be able to support a full-time coordinator for the partnership.

And so therefore several of them had made promises and now they're in the process of making good on those promises. I know a lot of folks that were on the saltwater side of the shop kind of got taken by surprise when they realized that their state agency had committed money to this.

And all I wanted to do is just throw this out for discussion as to where there is any feeling about the commission providing any financial support for this SARP coordinator. It is not a requirement.

I mean, as I told Vince I didn't hoodwink him. I didn't sell him down the farm by getting him to sign on to something and he didn't read the fine print. I mean it's purely voluntary at this point. There are no dues.

We're not going to get kicked out and talked bad about if we don't ante up any money. But I think most states are putting in \$5,000. Some are doing less. Some are not doing anything. It just depends on their individual situations.

So, anyway, with that I'll just open it up for discussion if anybody has got an opinion or wants a little more information about it. I always notice when it comes to anything to do with money everybody keeps their hands low and they don't even hardly look at me. (Laughter)

They just kind of keep their eyes -- Jack will look at me, though, because he's just shaking his head. And I don't think Virginia promised any money. I'm not sure Virginia is really an active participant in the SARP anyway.

Well, if I don't hear any strong opinion one way or the other we'll just let the issue pass and that makes Vince happy because he doesn't have to go back and make any adjustments to the budget.

OTHER BUISNESS

And I guess if things change I will do my best to let you know as quick as they change. So, any other business to come before the South Atlantic Board? If not I want to thank Nancy and the rest of the staff as always for the good job you did and thank you, Bill, again and thank you for your attention. And I'll entertain a motion to adjourn.

ADJOURNMENT

DR. MAHOOD: So moved.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Okay, we'll see you in August.

(Whereupon, the South Atlantic State-Federal Fisheries Management Board adjourned on Monday, May 9, 2005, at 3:36 o'clock, p.m.)

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