

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

**Radisson Hotel Old Town
Alexandria, Virginia
May 9, 2007**

Board Approved November 1, 2007

ATTENDANCE

Board Members

Peter Himchak, NJ DFW, proxy for Chanda (AA)	John Frampton, SC DNR (AA)
Erling Berg, NJ (GA)	Dr. Malcolm Rhodes, SC (GA)
Roy Miller, DE, proxy for P. Emory , (AA)	Robert H. Boyles, Jr., SC (LA)
Bernie Pankowski, DE proxy for Sen. Venables (LA)	Spud Woodward, GA, proxy for S. Shipman (AA)
Howard King, MD DNR (AA)	James Sanders, GA, proxy for John Duren (GA)
Russell Dize, MD, proxy for Sen. Colburn (LA)	Gil McRae, FL FWC (AA)
Louis Daniel, NC (AA)	April Price, FL (GA)
Damon Tatem, NC (GA)	Bob Sadler, NMFS
Jimmy Johnson, NC, proxy for Rep. Wainwright (LA)	Wilson Laney, USFWS

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

Ex-Officio Members

Bill Windley, Atlantic Croaker Advisory Panel Chair	Joe Grist, VMRC, Spot PRT Member
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Staff

Vince O'Shea	Brad Spear
Nichola Meserve	Robert Beal

Guests

Dick Brame, CCA	Sean McKeon, NCFA
Steve Meyers, NMFS	Bennie Williams, USFWS

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1. **Approval of Agenda, by Consent.** (Page 5)
2. **Approval of Proceedings of October 24, 2006, by Consent.** (Page 5)
3. **Move that the Board request that the ISFMP Policy Board consider authorizing the South Atlantic Board to begin development of a fishery management plan for southern kingfish in the 2008 Action Plan.** (Page 8) Motion by Dr. Louis Daniel; Second by Dr. Wilson Laney. Motion Carried. (Page 9)
4. **Move to approve the nominations to the Red Drum Technical and Stock Assessment Committees.** (Page 16) Motion by Robert H. Boyles, Jr.; Second by Gil McRae. Motion Carried. (Page 16)

CALL TO ORDER

CHAIRMAN SPUD WOODWAD: If I could have everybody's attention, anyone interested in participating in the South Atlantic Board, please take your seat. I want to get started. We're already late but I want to go ahead and get this process moving along so please take your seats and let's get ready.

Well, even though it's a sparse number of people we will get started so we can get our business done. Thanks. Well, I guess that they didn't realize that we had a substantially revised agenda and have several things we're going to be doing. I am Spud Woodward, chair of the South Atlantic State and Federal Fishery Management Board.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

I welcome you all to our meeting. We will get right into our agenda. We've got both a printed agenda available and one on the briefing CD. **Any changes to the agenda? Seeing none, we'll consider it accepted.**

APPROVAL OF PROCEEDINGS

And you also have a set of minutes from our last meeting held in October of 2006. **Are there any additions, corrections to the minutes? If not we will consider those accepted by consent as well.**

PUBLIC COMMENT

This is the time on our agenda where we have public comment. If you have, if there is anyone from the public in attendance and would like to comment on any issue that is not on the agenda, now would be the time to do it. We don't have any sign-in cards and I don't see anyone rushing to the microphone so we will move along.

SOUTHERN KINGFISH PRESENTATION

Next I'd like to call on Dr. Louis Daniel from North Carolina to make a presentation about southern kingfish. This is something we discussed very briefly at our last meeting and I wanted to offer Louis the opportunity to give us a briefing about this fishery and his ideas about the possibility of an inter-jurisdictional management. With that, Louis, I'd turn it over to you.

DR. LOUIS DANIEL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think "presentation" may be a little strong. And I

would get, Brad if you can just kind of move them along as we go, I'll do my best to speak to this. North Carolina is in the process of developing a kingfish fishery management plan. And based on the analyses that we've done we were able to get enough information on southern kingfish.

And I had my staff spending a lot of time trying to put together a stock assessment for southern kingfish and we never could get it through our review process, our peer review process. And one of the reasons is what I'm going to show you here today. These are the North Carolina commercial and recreational landings for kingfish, sometimes called whiting, sea mullet, various other names.

You can see a relatively stable commercial landings since the late '90s and perhaps a slightly increasing trend in the recreational fishery. Next slide. If you look at the species composition of the fishery it's dominated by southern kingfish with to a lesser degree northern and then there are also a few gulf kingfish mixed in. Next slide.

In terms of a commercial harvest, the bulk of the fishery is prosecuted with gillnets, to a lesser degree shrimp trawls. At one time this was the primary fishery that we ran into trouble with back in the late '90s when we had folks going into the area south of Cape Hatteras with shrimp trawls and fin fishing with those nets.

That was primarily to prosecute the left hand side of that spike in the middle there around 1998-1999. And once we required those nets to have 50 percent shrimp in them, those landings dropped off pretty dramatically. And the winter trawl, the same way. Once the flynet closure occurred south of Cape Hatteras, the flynet landings virtually went away to nothing. Next slide.

But here is the problem. The bulk of the landings, this is, these are the South Atlantic landings going back to - I'm trying to read the - from back to the '50s. And you can see that there has been a pretty dramatic decline in the landings of kingfish. It's not really indicative if you just look at North Carolina. Next slide.

And this is a breakdown of the various species in the South Atlantic recreational landings. And, again, it's dominated by southern with northern and gulfs contributing but the bulk of them are for southern kingfish. Next slide.

Here are the recreational landings by state, by

number and weight. And that's really, that's the meat right there: East Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, much bigger player in terms of number and weight for the most part than North Carolina, then Virginia to a much lesser degree. Next slide.

Looking at the trends in the various areas, there does seem to be more of a decline, overall decline, in the commercial fishery for the South Atlantic than there does in North Carolina. And the recreational fishery it's kind of difficult to see a trend and it's fairly stable but it's at a very high level. Next slide.

So, we've done quite a few things in North Carolina that indirectly impact kingfish or directly impact kingfish. And I think that's the last slide. Is it? Yes. And so really the idea of the question for the South Atlantic Board is, is there interest in pursuing a Southern Kingfish Fishery Management Plan?

We tried to do an assessment based on North Carolina catches. We couldn't do it. And then when we looked at it, the main problem was the fact that the majority of the landings occurred outside of North Carolina and so we're moving forward.

I'm hoping that my/our Kingfish FMP will be in front of our joint legislative committee on seafood and aquaculture in the next few weeks or the next few months and we're going to move forward. We've got some gillnet rules in there as well as a size limit in there.

But if we wanted to do, you know, I know this is important to all the southern South Atlantic states. Whether or not you all feel the rules on the, from the right whale stranding is adequate to deal with all the issues on kingfish in the remainder of the South Atlantic or not, I'm not really, I don't have a good feel for that.

But I would certainly love to see us be able to, if we could do a plan and do a coastwide assessment with all our state partners, I think we would benefit from that. And it's certainly, it's certainly a much more inter-jurisdictional fishery than, say, spotted seatrout. And so it does certainly fit into the interests of the South Atlantic Board. And so that's my feeling on it. I'd love to get response from the board if there is any on your thinking.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you, Louis, and thanks for putting that data together. That's the first time I've certainly seen the regional compilation of data and it is a very important fishery to many states, including Georgia. In fact you can tell by the

volume of landings I do believe it is the Number 1 fish in terms of volume and sort of the "everyman's" saltwater fish. So with that I'll open it up to the board for comments. John Frampton.

MR. JOHN FRAMPTON: Louis, just out of curiosity, what's the change in the unit or effort over that time period that commercial decline has occurred, any idea?

DR. DANIEL: Yes, we've seen, a lot of that is reflective of effort on the trawl fisheries but in the gillnet fisheries it's pretty stable and going up, and on the recreational side it's going up. We've had some good years. This fish lives to be about nine years old.

Charlie Winner did some work back in the '70s-'80s - I think it was the '80s - and so there is some information down there from your way. But they didn't even, back then they didn't see any fish over like four or five years old. So what we're seeing is certainly a truncated age distribution and size distribution as well.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Dr. Rhodes.

DR. MALCOLM RHODES: Well, Louis, and/or other members here, what is the current biomass from the trawl surveys or SEAMAP? Are we stable with that? Is it an increasing biomass? Or has that even really been looked at?

DR. DANIEL: We did, we started - I don't know if we looked at that or not, Malcolm. I think because we couldn't parse it out just for the North Carolina sector and we were doing a North Carolina assessment I don't think I have that. I know they catch a lot of kingfish in the SEAMAP survey.

When I was in Charleston we would process a lot of kingfish on the SEAMAP surveys so I know we have a lot of information and it's species-specific. But certainly SEAMAP would be a critical component in any assessment to look at the kingfish biomass.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Just from the Georgia perspective, you know we've struggled with the same thing that North Carolina has experienced. We tried to do a state-specific assessment and were frustrated with just not knowing how to grab a hold of this thing.

You know we've got, obviously you've got a substantial amount of shrimp trawl bycatch. Trying to quantify that was problematic. We know that that is changing over time because effort is declining in

the trawl fishery. We went from, you know from unmodified trawls to TEDs and BRDs and things like that that obviously affected bycatch. So it is a very important fish in Georgia.

You know, like I say, it's sort of the "everyman's" saltwater fish and to the point that our fishing guides who would sort of hold their noses up at fishing for the lowly whiting realized that they were missing a golden opportunity to stay in out of the wind and, you know, provide an opportunity at \$40 to \$50 a head to catch something that's pretty easy to catch.

And so they started directing the effort on whiting and it became sort of a mainstream activity in the for-hire sector of the fishery. So, you know this is a lot – well, I don't want to draw a comparison between this and the cunner conundrum, but it is a similar situation in that we do, you know, we're looking at the possibility of adding something to the list.

With that said, we've had discussions before about the species that are under the purview of this board and the fact that we are, you know, and Vince may take exception to this but I'd like to think we've put a minimum burden on the staff and on the process because most of our assessments are spread out in time and that sort of thing.

So, there may be room but, again, I guess it would come down to you know if the board would like to pursue this in any manner we'll have to come before the policy and everybody else and look at the action plan and that sort of thing. I see Robert Boyles and then I think Dick Brame, would you like to make a comment? Robert and then Dick.

MR. ROBERT H. BOYLES, JR.: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I agree with Louis. This is something that at least from our perspective we know it's out there. We don't have, we have not really done a lot of work on this species, and particularly in light of what Louis made the comment about, referencing spotted seatrout.

I think this is much more in keeping with an interstate fishery management plan than is something like spotted seatrout that would be a little bit more localized. So, I think it's certainly something that we ought to take a look at. Where we go and how we do it, I'm not really looking for a whole heck of a lot in more things to do. It's difficult enough to manage what we've got. But this is one that's, there's just too many unknowns and I think it's something that we ought to pursue.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you, Robert. Dick.

MR. DICK BRAME: Dick Brame with the Coastal Conservation Association. I fiddled around with the recreational and commercial landings of, for lack of a better term, the southern groundfish assemblage of spot, croaker, whiting, and even gray trout. And south of Hatteras there tends to be, there seems to be a general decline across all of it.

So I think it's something worth looking at, not only just for whiting but I think all of the species at least south of Hatteras are declining for whatever reason and I think it would behoove us as an interstate compact to look at that and try to figure it out.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you, Dick. Louis.

DR. DANIEL: Could I ask Vince or Bob to, I mean, because I'd be willing to make a motion that we recommend to the ISFMP Policy Board that they add kingfish, southern kingfish to our list of species and begin development of a plan. But I'd like to hear from staff, first.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Yes, that was going to be my next inquiry is to get their opinion on the addition of this species.

MR. ROBERT E. BEAL: Well, you know I think it all just feeds into next year's action plan, similar to the cunner discussion we had a little while ago. You know, if the South Atlantic Board does want to pursue a kingfish interstate plan of some sort I think between sort of now and the August and Annual Meeting when we discuss next year's work plan we should try to map out the resources that would be needed to do this and the timeline and those sorts of things so that the Policy Board kind of knows what you're asking for more than just a Kingfish FMP.

And I think we can, you know, we know the amount of assessment work and is it going to put burdens on the system as far as state surveys and data collection and all those details that, you know, what are the impacts to the states as well as to the ASMFC, you know, resources. I think we can answer some of those and it will help out in the discussion.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Okay, Vince.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JOHN V. O'SHEA: Mr. Chairman, I think one of the other issues besides the data things, the availability of data, I think it would

be helpful would also be a sense of you know commitment to engage in actual management of that species, you know, where the affected states feel on that.

In other words, there is no point in going through this whole exercise if at the end of the day we're going to just say, well, let's just do status quo, to be quite blunt. And that would certainly be the argument that is going into come up in the cunner discussion, I suspect, with some of the other states. So in the sense that you could build that in, I think that would be useful information for the board to consider.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: All right, thank you for that, Vince. I know, again from the Georgia perspective, we implemented size and possession limit restrictions on whiting several years back and then were dealt an unfortunate slap in the face when one of our legislators went in and had the, what we thought was a very generous 35 fish per person per day possession limit repealed because his constituents could not get enough fish for their family fish fries at that possession limit so.

But, again, we had nothing really to combat that with other than I think, you know, trying the philosophical approach of proactive management. That didn't get a lot of traction up there that particular year. So I know that Georgia is certainly, we're certainly willing to take what we learn and go forward with it and implement it as management. Robert.

MR. BOYLES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Again, to follow on your comments, our DNR board had recommended to the legislature some recreational limits on kingfish as well as spot and croaker and perch and we kind of ran into the same buzz saw with, shall we say, some localized constituencies that were basically entrenched.

And so the bill that includes weakfish that has passed the state senate was stripped of these what we call small sciaenids and our effort was simply to get out in front and be proactive, recognizing that these species are under a great deal of pressure, not only from fishing but also just habitat degradation and some of the manifestations of water quality problems. And so I think we've got a bit of a hill to climb in South Carolina.

And to Vince's point, I don't want to mislead the board but at the end of the day it would be nice to have some good, solid, regional information on this. And so whether we pursue this formally as part of an interstate fishery management plan or we seat an

informal working group I do think it's something that we need to look at.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Louis.

DR. DANIEL: Well, I would certainly commit the resources from the State of North Carolina to do this as an inter-jurisdictional fishery management plan. And I may be pursuing this from a little bit of a selfish standpoint as well because I am very concerned about the issue that occurred with the right whale and the forthcoming regulations associated with that stranding.

And I have a real fear that the South Atlantic Council or the federal government could take over management of this fishery since there is no fishery management plan for this and it created that problem. And I would much rather this board and this commission manage the kingfish resource with them being so coastally important than having maybe the federal agencies come in and try to manage that fishery. And so you know I think it's a very important fishery. I've heard around the table that they, everybody believes it's important.

So I would **move that we request that the ISFMP Policy Board authorize the South Atlantic Council or to consider authorizing the South Atlantic Council to develop a – no? I'm sorry. South Atlantic Board, sorry. I get confused – to develop a fishery management plan for southern kingfish in next year's work plan.** I think that covered staffs' issues on making sure it was considered reasonably with species to add.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: All right, do I have a second to the motion? Second from Wilson Laney. All right, some discussion. I want to hear from some of our other maybe geographically separated partners and some of the others. Gil.

MR. GIL McRAE: Well, we're in the same boat. We, like the other states, anticipate this is going to be an emerging fishery as folks shift from other species and charter business develops in Northeast Florida. We do have a fairly decent fisheries independent monitoring program that has some time trend data on kingfish, whiting.

It seems to me there might be a middle ground here between going right from where we are now to the motion on the board. And there is a fact-finding step, perhaps, that would lead us to become more informed on our ability to conduct an assessment because we've looked at this species as well.

And the amount of work needed to be done to get to a decent assessment, and especially across multiple states, may be, might be more than we're willing to take on. So I'm not in opposition to this, I'm just encouraging us to look at perhaps a middle ground step.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: All right, thank you, Gil. I think we're in a situation where we, you know, we don't necessarily have to swim the English Channel when we can probably just swim across the pool. So Louis, do you have a –

DR. DANIEL: Yes, and perhaps to address Gil's point and maybe to begin development, I mean that doesn't say we're going to do it in a time certain but it does say we would be able to – and my intent there would be to address exactly what you just said, that we would have an opportunity for our plan development team or whatever to get together and see what information we have.

North Carolina has done a lot and have compiled a lot of information from your various states and finding out other things that you may have it may be an easier task than we think. It may not be. So I agree with your concerns.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Any further discussion? Any other comments or questions of Louis related to this? I need to read the motion. We have a motion before the board, moved that the board request that the ISFMP Policy Board consider authorizing the South Atlantic Board to begin development of a fishery management plan for southern kingfish in the 2008 action plan. Motion by Dr. Daniel; second by Dr. Laney. Any opposition to the motion as presented? Seeing none, the motion carries. Thank you, Louis.

DR. DANIEL: Thank you.

SPOT PLAN REVIEW TEAM: FOLLOW-UP REPORT TO THE FMP REVIEW

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: And we'll be working with staff to move this along. Okay, the next item on our agenda is a Spot Plan Review Team, a follow-up report from Joe Grist on the FMP review.

MS. NICHOLA MESERVE: I'm just going to give the background for this issue before handing it over to Joe. In the 2006 FMP review for spot this was presented to the board in October and this report

included two points that interested the board, first that there had been a decline in coastwide landings and, second, that no effort data had been analyzed yet to determine a relationship between landings and abundance.

Thus, the board tasked the Spot Plan Review Team with formulating spot catch per unit effort from existing data and the result was three reports from Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, the three states that currently dominate the landings. Joe Grist from Virginia Marine Resources Commission is here to present the reports that he authorized along with Harry Rickabaugh and John Schoolfield, so I'll pass it to him now.

MR. JOE GRIST: All right, thanks, Nichola. You can go to the next slide. We'll get this rolling through. The Spot PRT has had a couple of conference calls on this issue just trying to gather what information we have between the three states and see what's going on. I'm going to just turn through a varied series by state, all the indices and landings data that we have.

First off, from Maryland we have two juvenile indices from the Chesapeake Bay. These were derived from a striped bass juvenile seine survey – that up there in blue – and the blue crab trawl survey in pink. This graph shows the results from '89 through '06 when the two indices are statistically correlated.

Both of these JIs generally showed declines. They did have a few spikes in abundance since 1980s. Some we kind of, we generally understand about spot or it's been a perception that you always see these little bumps in the population as we go along and a lot of these indices will kind of show that but it's a more recent decline will show up in landings and all that really got everyone's attention. Next slide.

Two more JIs were derived from surveys from the coast so the first two were from Chesapeake Bay. These were from the coastal trawl index in Maryland and the coastal seine index. Again, these two were also correlated with each other and overall they do indicate a slight downward trend in the abundance from '89 through '06.

This is using stand-by years in the surveys. These indices are not correlated back to Chesapeake Bay but they are correlated with each other. Maryland's commercial landings were presented to us all the way back from 1929. Now most mandatory reporting programs came in during the early 1990s. Their

landings ranged anywhere from 600 pounds to nearly 600,000 pounds. I seem to have gotten the bleed-over mic.

Over the last 16 years Maryland's commercial landings have been variable at a relatively moderate level. There is a bit of a drop off in '04 that was some recovery in '05. We didn't have the '06 data from Maryland when we did this presentation but when you see the '06 data from Virginia and North Carolina it's really going to be indicative about what we're worried about.

Also, notice the Maryland landings are in the thousands of pounds. What we'll be showing you for the other two states is in the millions. Pound nets and gillnets are the primary gears for harvest of spot in Maryland. Although spot aren't generally targeted they are part of a mixed fish catch within that state.

When they are more profitable, when more profitable species are available or if only smaller spot are available it's possible the fishermen are just discarding the spot or avoiding them completely. There was no CPUE data previously calculated. With temporal and spatial data limitations CPUEs can only be developed with several assumptions.

Pound net CPUEs were calculated as pounds per net month; gillnets, as pounds per yard hour. Since the 1980s both the pound net and gillnet commercial CPUE indices generally increased over time. But the two were not statistically correlated by Maryland.

Maryland recreational harvest information, for recreational harvest the MRFSS estimates from Maryland were highly variable early in the time series, during the 1980s, fairly stable around the mean from '89 through '95 and then fairly, and then over the past few years they have gone from the second highest harvest in 2003, which is pretty noticeable on the graph, to below average in '04 and then back above for '05 and '06.

The majority of recreational spot catch is from the inland waters in Maryland and none of the juvenile indices were significantly correlated with these landings. Maryland recreational CPUE, you know this is primarily private boat and shore anglers in inland waters. This has generally decreased over time with a few spikes and a small amount of potential recovery or increases from '03 through '05.

The MRFSS index is not significantly correlated with any of the JIs or commercial CPUEs that we previously presented. But it does track with the, as a

one-year lag JI but more closely with the commercial indices. Another look at Maryland's recreational CPUEs.

This is from their logbooks which shows slight decline from '93 through '04, before rebounding slightly in '05 and '06. Both the MRFSS private boat and charter boat indices did appear to follow a similar trend of general decline over the time with some recovery in the past couple of years but none of this is significantly correlated by Maryland.

Now on to Virginia. I mentioned before we were dealing with thousands of pounds, now we're into millions of pounds. And the general – let's see if we can do a little better over here – and you will notice the general decline from Virginia is southward. Virginia waters have averaged about 3.3 million pounds from '94 through '06 and has ranged from anywhere from 4.3 million pounds back in '94 to just a low of 1.8 in 2006.

The low harvest in '06 definitely represents the third declining year that we've seen a decline and we are having this noted to us not just with the numbers. I can personally vouch for watermen coming to my office talking about this and wanting to know what is going on with the spot.

Gillnets represent about 80 percent of the commercial harvest in this time period; pound nets, about 10 percent; haul seines, about 9 percent. And all other gears make up just what's leftover. Gillnet harvests have had several peaks over 3 million pounds: '94, '98, and 2000. However, since '04 landings have decreased in the time series to a low of 1.4 million pounds.

The dependent indices that we were able to generate representing pounds per trips were developed through our mandatory reporting database. For inshore gillnets and haul seines from '94 through 2005 directed gillnet trips were classified as those that harvested 100 pounds of spot or greater.

We did this in agreement with North Carolina's data, trying to come up with CPUE values that we could compare so the same guidelines were used in North Carolina. The inshore index peaked in 1998, about 632 pounds per trip, has been in overall decline since. However, prior to '98 the inshore gillnet/pound net per trip are similar in value as kind of evident on here.

The haul seine has just bounced all over the place. It's still within a range from '94 through '05. You

can't really discern anything specifically from this, from the haul seine. But then again it only represents about 9 percent of the overall catch versus gillnet which is about 80 percent of everything.

Recreational harvest, this is where it gets a little interesting for us. As our commercial has seen a decline our recreational harvest has seen, according to MRFSS, has seen an increase. The average harvest is about 923,000 pounds for the time series. We've seen a high in 2006 of 1.5 million pounds and a low of 240,000 in 1999.

For the time series recreational harvest has represented about 20 percent of the overall harvest. However, since '03 the recreational component is comprising about 46 percent of the overall harvest. So we're seeing a bit of a flip here, also.

Recreational CPUE for Virginia, same time period, again we're seeing this increase. It has fluctuated between the average harvest being anywhere from 3 to 8 fish with an average of about five fish. From '99 through '03, the CPUE was below average but then since it has come back up in '04 and '05. We didn't have any '06 data yet.

The next slide is something that's more telling. These are juvenile indices from the Virginia Chesapeake Bay. These are from VIMS. This is a VIMS survey that has been conducted annually. It's a trawl survey, since 1955, for one set of indexes and '79, then the indices also from the bottom are from '79 but it's based on the same trawl survey.

This has provided the only spot young of the year index available on the East Coast since, for the '03 FMP. In '06 they reported that spot had often been the most abundant of the recreational species caught by the survey and spot distribution is still wide and consistent throughout the sampling range.

The indices provided from the trawl survey included a random stratified converted index – that's at the very top there – and a bay and river and river-only index which is on the bottom. The report indicated that the top index for spot exhibited a significant negative slope when regressed against a year and a consistent decline is evident from 1992 to present; however, the top index as well as the lower have all shown an increase around '05 which we can't explain completely. But we have seen this general decline in the VIMS trawl survey.

And, finally, North Carolina. Again, we're in the millions of pounds of landings here. And again if

you look at the graph it kind of talks. It speaks for itself. We're seeing a general decline since around 2000-2001. This fishery is dominated by ocean inshore gillnet and long haul. Declines greater than 20 percent have occurred in 3 out of 12 years, the most recently in '05 where the harvest decreased 26 percent to reach an historic low.

After that statement we did add the '06 data from John Schoolfield and it's even lower than the '05 data. The decline in '05 they were explaining was a decline in effort following Hurricane Katrina and the resulting escalation of fuel prices which hit everybody. Overall, the gradual decline in landings probably resulted from a declining effort. In particular, effort has declined since '94 in both the ocean gillnet and long haul fisheries, although the inshore gillnet trips have increased, even in 2005.

Spot trips, again this kind of goes back to previously we were talking about effort increases. Well, gillnet has generally been increasing as it shows. But, interestingly enough, when they added this, updated this slide in the last week there was a drastic decline in the gillnet frequency for '06.

The reasoning for this we haven't gone into a deep discussion about yet as to why we saw that big drop off of effort. For the other two, for gillnet ocean and for long haul there has been a general decline over time but it's that gillnet inside that we have really been paying a lot of attention to.

The commercial CPUE for spot gillnet, ocean and inshore in general, these all come from the North Carolina Trip Ticket Program. These are all, of course, directed. Both these CPUEs have been relatively stable so we're getting some mixed messages.

There is a long haul CPUE now available from North Carolina which also has been relatively stable over time. It's within its range. We aren't seeing that general drop-off at the very end. It is a slight decline, especially since 2000 but we're not seeing a drastic decline showing up.

Recreational harvest, it's bumped right along. It has averaged about 1.2 million pounds. Landings in '05 were 10.5 percent below the overall mean and these fluctuations are very common in the spot fishery. It's something we're kind of used to. High fuel prices may have impacted the '05 effort. The '06 effort, we're not quite sure, but it has seen a bit of a decrease over the average.

Recreational CPUE, again generally on an increase here for North Carolina. It has fluctuated between 4 and 10 fish. The '06 value was 6.6 fish, slightly below the 18-year mean of 7.3. The trend line overall, though, has a positive slope so recreationally we're seeing more of an upward trend; commercially, more downward.

The juvenile indices for North Carolina, Pamlico Sound Trawl Survey, their juvenile abundance index. From the Pamlico Sound they have a, the CPUEs have had extremely variable values with no clear trend. In '06 the lowest value was recorded for the 13-year time series and it was slightly below those for '94 and '95, '97 and '98 and 2000.

Other juvenile indices for North Carolina include their Estuarine Monitoring Program. Data from the Estuarine Monitoring Program was also used to create the juvenile abundance index here. The data has shown wide fluctuations with no clear trend. The JI in '06 was the second lowest since 1994.

They have started putting up their Pamlico Sound Independent Gillnet Survey, Adult Index. This is a short-term survey. It's relatively new. No distinct trend has come out of this survey for spot just as yet. Overall what we're looking at here from the PRT. The spot in commercial/recreational landings are highly variable, with some states, North Carolina and Virginia, in particular, seeing a decline in the short or long term.

Most CPUEs remain stable. Several have increased or decreased in specific fisheries. Effort has declined in some of the commercial fisheries which we noted; however, in some indication of a long, slow decline in spot abundance has also occurred. While this is kind of disconcerting to us, this is not unusual for this species.

It's something we've kind of recognized. And the data are inconclusive as to the cause of any decline right now. The life history of spot suggests that a year class strength is often determined by environmental conditions that prevail on the spawning grounds and nursery areas and fluctuations in year class strength are to be expected.

Human impacts may also affect water and habitat quality. For example, in the lower Chesapeake Bay it is a well-documented nursery area and everyone is aware of the amount of development we have going on there. The PRT would like to continue its work to improve the CPUE data that we've presented. We'd also like to follow this up with development of age

and length keys and catch at age matrices to provide more insight in the health of this stock.

This should be supplemented with additional information of life history attributes and habitat requirements for spot. And we would like to provide this to the South Atlantic Board as the best available science once we can get this all compiled. And with that I'll be open for questions as they come up.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you, Joe, for that. That's a lot of effort represented there in compiling that information. Questions for Joe. Louis.

DR. DANIEL: I was trying to wait for somebody else. I mean there is, we've just recently done our spot review and we do have some concerns because of some of the declining trends. I certainly concur with the PRT's conclusions but with one exception and it's always driven me crazy why we spend so much time and effort aging spot when every, I mean I've sat down with our aging biologists and looked at 250 spot otoliths and you know if you see a two, you know, you're excited.

They're all one-year olds, you know. And I think I'd like to hear some reasoning for that, why we would continue to do that, what we think it's going to tell us, and by the time we acted based on an age length key all the fish that we aged would be dead. So, I would think that we could get a lot more – I know North Carolina could get a lot more bang for its buck on spot management and research without the age information.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Joe, a response to that.

MR. GRIST: Having once worked in North Carolina I definitely understand. You're right. It's mostly Age 1. In Virginia, though, we are seeing a little bit larger age structure showing up. We've got them all the way out to five and six year olds from the preliminary data that I've seen. But we want to go back into that further with our aging lab and go through it completely.

That's why we've asked for the extra time to look at this. I know, Louis, I know the laugh so, but we want to go back into this further. The preliminary data we saw did show it out, a lot more age classes than just Age 1 for Virginia so we wanted to go further into it. Now maybe nothing will come of it, and that's an outcome also, but at least look at it.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: A follow-up, Louis.

DR. DANIEL: Yes, you know Jimmy said you all ought to age our herring. That's why I laughed. If you're seeing five and six year old spot, then I'll shut up. I mean I've never heard of such a thing. And I would assume that they're all using sectioned otoliths or, I mean everybody is doing it consistently. And if that's the case and you're seeing fish that old, I mean, we'll keep aging those one-year old spot. But if Virginia is seeing five and six year old fish we need to keep finding them.

MR. GRIST: Yes. We did, like I said, we did a preliminary looking at our data ODU runs our aging shop. And we looked back to about '98 and we started seeing from that period four, fives and sixes, even. And that kind of caused a little question for my staff, even. But we saw it in the data so what we want to do is just go back and go through it. We have seen a decline since then, though. It's kind of gotten back down to the, just the ones and twos. But, again, we just want to have the time to look at it and give you the best information possible.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Any other questions for Joe? Well, I can say on behalf of the board we certainly appreciate you all's efforts and we appreciate your willingness to keep chasing this. And we will do what we can. I think we're probably in the similar situation that Louis.

We see a lot of spot but I don't know how many, you know, two year olds and three year olds there may be but we will, Georgia will do its part to help contribute to this so thank you again, Joe. All right, we will move on to the next agenda item. It's Spotted Seatrout Plan Review Team and I'm going to ask Nichola to report on their follow-up activities.

SPOTTED SEATROUT PLAN REVIEW TEAM: FOLLOW-UP REPORT TO THE FMP REVIEW

MS. MESERVE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This presentation is going to provide an overview of a report from the Spotted Seatrout Plan Review Team in response to a board task, also from the last meeting in October of 2006.

In October the PRT submitted the Annual FMP Review to the board and this report included the following points: that the current FMP does not require state compliance through ACFCMA, meaning that it's management measures, a 12-inch minimum size limit and a 20 percent spawning potential ratio goal, are voluntary. And this has resulted in various

state-specific fishing regulations and SPR goals. The state assessments indicate that the 20 percent SPR goal is being met and exceeded in Florida but may not be being reached in South Carolina and Georgia and that no other state had an estimate for SPR.

The review also included a recommendation to the board to develop an amended FMP which would include objective compliance criteria. From this recommendation the board had some questions about this for more information and the PRT was tasked with six questions and I'll provide the responses now.

The first question was is the FMP goal to maintain 20 percent SPR adequate to avoid recruitment failure and maintain abundance and if not, what should it be. The PRT has some differing opinions on this. Based on available results from other species many fish biologists have reached the conclusion that this value is not conservative enough. Spotted seatrout populations are susceptible to inshore calamities such as winter freezes and red tides, for example. Additionally, during the development of Amendment 1 a 35 percent SPR goal was discussed by some as being safe from recruitment failure.

On the other hand, Georgia's spotted seatrout population appears to be doing well despite SPRs below the 20 percent goal for several years and Florida has not seen a benefit in higher recruitment from attaining SPRs that are greater than 40 percent since the mid-1990s. Two PRT members indicated that the board should not increase the SPR goal until all states make that goal and before then several states need more data to even estimate SPR in order to determine compliance with a goal.

Of note is that North Carolina will be producing its first spotted seatrout assessment I believe in 2007 and 2008. And it may be wise to have this assessment complete as well as a finalized assessment from South Carolina before changing any management requirements. In general, however, the spotted, the – sorry, the PRT agreed that SPR is an objective compliance measure.

The second question was if 20 percent SPR is an adequate goal and continues to be an FMP objective but is not being achieved, what management changes should the commission make. Two PRT members provided responses for this question that included implementing more conservative size and creel limits.

The representative from Florida on the PRT indicated that the 15 to 20 inch slot limit with one fish allowed

over 20 inches and a four or five fish bag limit, depending on location, appears to be working for the state. And the representative from South Carolina on the PRT supported a 14-inch minimum size limit that is currently undergoing review in the state because it would allow female survival until Age 2 which has several benefits for reproductive potential.

The third question was whether a coastwide assessment would be possible, practical and statistically valid. The PRT responded that spotted seatrout are a largely non-migratory species with little exchange happening between the states; therefore, exchange is not currently factored into the design of stock assessments.

Migration within several states' own estuaries is also very limited. An exception to this non-migratory trait would be the Chesapeake Bay spotted seatrout that undergo spring/fall migrations to and from northern North Carolina coastal waters. It's also likely that some minimal exchange does occur across state boundaries that is not being accounted for in current assessments.

Regardless of this minor exchange, however, the PRT agreed that a coastwide assessment would be possible and maybe practical for coastwide management but would not be statistically valid. In reality, a coastwide assessment wouldn't be more than state-specific assessments with some added features that would capture the exchange of recruit, juvenile, and adult fish across the state boundaries. And given that the majority of states have no assessment or an assessment with uncertain results it was difficult to imagine this materializing and for what great benefit.

The fourth question was should we continue with state-specific assessments and how can they be done under the umbrella of a commission plan. The PRT supported the continuation of state-specific assessments. However, poor data and limited staff availability or expertise have left many states with assessments with either unreliable results or no assessment.

A commission plan could dictate the minimum data collection requirements for each state for the assessment method that was chosen, and once state-specific assessments could be conducted, stock status results could be judged against commission reference points.

The fifth question was how do you manage individual state populations through a coastwide commission plan. The PRT responded that a plan

would include broad goals that would ensure the population in each of the states is maintained at a healthy level. Minimum regulatory and monitoring requirements to reach the goals would need to be set and all the states would need to comply.

This would require an ACFCMA-compliant plan. Such a plan ought to include de minimis criteria to determine states that should be exempt from such requirements. And because the stocks are locally oriented, measures should be written so that individual states have multiple options to be in compliance with the requirements.

In essence, managing individual state populations through the commission could be similar to using the state-specific compliance report model which is now in place but supplementing the report with an assessment for each state that provides the state's estimate of the appropriate management metric.

However, the PRT stressed, again, that the main problem would be that most states within the region lack the technical expertise to conduct the assessments or the data for the spotted seatrout populations.

The sixth question was, given the localized nature of spotted seatrout stocks, is inter-jurisdictional management appropriate. Because limited inter-jurisdictional movement occurs, the PRT did question inter-jurisdictional management for spotted seatrout. The states in which spotted seatrout is an important fishery are already going beyond some of the recommendations in the FMP.

The PRT did agree that the current commission plan should remain in place because it encourages states to keep working towards the goals. Several PRT members did think that the plan's minimum requirements should become mandatory compliance measures. This slide just has a couple of the key points that I went over and I'll leave it up just so there is something up there, I guess. And if there are any questions I can try to answer them for you now.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you, Nichola. I appreciate the PRT's perspective on this. Obviously this is a question that we've discussed a few meetings back and, again, looking at how we best use our time and resources. And now we're obviously making a decision to look at adding another species so I guess I'd like a little discussion and feedback from the board about the PRT's analysis of our situation with spotted seatrout. Don't everybody jump at one time here. Gil.

MR. McRAE: Well, just from the Florida perspective I can say that we're pretty much doing all the things that would be required and I guess we're better off relative to our data and our stock assessment expertise. And we do these assessments anyhow, so none of this would really be a change for us so I don't have any concerns with moving toward this.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Robert.

MR. BOYLES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd kind of like to echo Gil's comment but with a, for the board to know that we outsourced our stock assessment. We just don't have the capacity. We have generated a tremendous amount of data with the trammel net surveys that we've got a time series that goes back many years.

But in terms of doing the assessment itself, the state-specific assessment, itself, it is very, very difficult for us. And I think two years ago we contracted with some staff at or faculty at North Carolina State to do that so we are doing a lot of these things but we are somewhat limited as well resource-wise.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Louis, any comments from North Carolina on this? Is there a strong will in the board to deviate from the status quo that we're on right now? I think there is always some concern about compliance measures and mandatory monitoring requirements in our current fiscal conditions. And I think every state is certainly very interested in protecting and properly managing spotted seatrout.

I mean it's a very important fishery in the Southeast. But, I guess I would like to be convinced that, you know, the investment of time and effort to amend the plan and the resulting actions it's going to require on our part is going to produce something different than what we're doing right now and I'm not sure that this PRT review has really convinced me of that.

I mean I would like to have more resources and, you know, to do a better job at the state level but I don't think sort of painting ourselves into a corner is going to help that. In fact, it will just bring another stressor on top of an already stressed situation so. That's just my opinion, you know, from the Georgia perspective.

This doesn't mean this is not a very important feedback and it's good to do this every now and then. And, you know, I mentioned it before this board, I think it was a couple of meetings back, that you know, I questioned the need for having a spotted

seatrout, an interstate plan. And you know there is some wisdom to just staying with status quo, I suppose.

And I'm not strongly inclined to disband the plan and stand down from it unless somebody were to convince me otherwise. And I don't think our PRT is, feels that way, either. So without seeing any interest in doing anything beyond the status quo we will certainly take that – Wilson.

DR. WILSON LANEY: Mr. Chairman, I'd just, I'm not going to advocate doing anything beyond the status quo, I just had a question relative to the key points that Nichola had on the board referencing the last bullet there where it says, "The FMP should be kept in place and maybe made enforceable."

My sense is that most of the measures that would be considered for compliance measures are already in effect in the four South Atlantic states, anyway. Am I correct in that? So I guess the question would be, what else would the PRT think would be needed that should be, you know, made a mandatory compliance measure other than I suppose some SPR measurement?

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: That's my interpretation is that they would like to see, those who were advocating for it, see each state demonstrate that they are meeting the 20 percent SPR or exceeding it, which obviously opens up a considerable can of worms, as we've already discussed here. And I know I would like to be able to do that in my state but we are, you know we are limited in the resources we could do.

So, I mean, you're right, everybody is at the minimum size limit of 12 inches or beyond it and there is no requirement for possession limits at this point. So you know I don't see any advantage to necessarily taking us down a road and getting us tangled up in that. But I would certainly entertain those discussions so, Dr. Rhodes.

DR. RHODES: First of all I want to commend Nichola for all this work and her committee. I agree with everything that has been said. I think this is one of those species that our constituents are going to be so tuned into that all the fisheries managers are going to be responding rapidly to any changes in spite of what an interstate policy is, an ASMFC policy is.

Having these periodic reassessments is wonderful because you can see if Florida's changes or North Carolina's changes, Georgia or South Carolina makes

a substantive change on the population, also. So I think the managers of all the other states could see if that is a policy, a plan or limits that may need to be followed. But I think that's a great way of working together. I don't think it needs to be changed, per se, because more importantly it's such a local fishery for the most part of its range.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you. Any other comments about the PRT report? All right, again, thank you, Nichola, and I certainly want to thank the PRT members for their hard work. We'll move on to Agenda Item Number 7 and this is a Red Drum Stock Assessment and Enhancement updates, Nichola.

RED DRUM STOCK ASSESSMENT AND ENHANCEMENT UPDATES

MS. MESERVE: I just have a couple of quick updates on red drum. First is that the next red drum stock assessment is scheduled for the spring of 2009 through the SEDAR process. I've had some preliminary discussion with John Carmichael, the SEDAR Coordinator, to start working out dates for the two workshops.

And in anticipation of the assessment the Red Drum TC will be meeting May 24th to develop an assessment timeline that fits with the SEDAR schedule and also to work on preliminary data issues prior to the start of the SEDAR process, in recognition that there are some data deficiencies that need to be worked on before then.

Before we have that meeting the membership of the TC and the stock assessment subcommittee should be updated. On both the TC and the stock assessment subcommittee Joe Grist has been nominated to replace Rob O'Reilly. Lee Paramore as chair of the TC has been nominated to also serve on the stock assessment subcommittee. And Carolyn Belcher from Georgia has been nominated to serve on the stock assessment subcommittee as well. So, once I'm done we'll be looking for a motion to approve those.

The Red Drum Stock Enhancement Subcommittee was newly appointed at the last board meeting and they met for the first time by a conference call to get acquainted with the objective of developing some type of stocking guidelines. Spud was on that call and it was determined that he would prepare an outline for the members to use to develop state status reports on red drum stocking.

And these will be presented when the subcommittee

meets on May 25th and from there the subcommittee is going to be determining its next steps. Reports from both those meetings will be available afterwards.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you, Nichola. Any questions about that status report? **I'd entertain a motion to approve the additions to our Red Drum Technical Committee and the stock assessment subcommittee.** I have a motion by Robert Boyles; Second by Gil McRae. And I'll read the motion once it's up there for Joe.

Okay, we have a motion. It is moved to approve the nominations to the Red Drum Technical and Stock Assessment Subcommittee. A motion by Mr. Boyles and second by Mr. McRae. Any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, **the motion carries.** Thank you. Okay, Louis.

DR. DANIEL: If you said something about this, Nichola, I apologize. Vince, did you say that there was some hesitancy or we were running into some problems with the SEDAR group to do the red drum assessment through the SEDAR?

And that disappoints me greatly because Vince and I made a very, I thought, compelling argument at the SEDAR Committee meeting and that they all agreed that we would do this. And we've been preparing for it. And I'm not so sure it wouldn't be appropriate for this board to send a letter, maybe, to the SEDAR Steering Committee expressing our sincere interest in having this run through the program, if that would help us.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Vince, do you want to respond to that?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR O'SHEA: Yes, thanks, Mr. Chairman. I think the sequence here is important. At the last SEDAR meeting I detected an interest by some members there to delay this or to push it back. And I made the argument that I thought this was an important thing to do and that would be the wrong thing to do. And my sense was I prevailed in that argument. But all the forces that wanted to delay this and move it, they're still out there and so I think it's going to be a continuing thing.

But the pitch I made was basically said, look, it's closed in the EEZ because of concerns for the stock, we are harvesting in state waters and it's a very popular fish, we're getting long line data coming out of this long line survey and it's really important that we get this stock assessment done, otherwise, why is

the EEZ closed and why are some of these other management measures in place. And that was basically the argument I made.

So, I think this conversation here is good because the next time it comes up and my sense of this board is that this is an important priority for you all and that I'll continue to carry that message to the SEDAR group.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you, Vince, and thank you for advocating for it. And certainly I would be willing to draft a letter on behalf of the board as board chair just to have it as a matter of record. You know, there has been some e-mail communications back and forth, again reiterating the need for this and our desire to have it stay on the SEDAR schedule but I'll certainly do whatever we need to do. Robert.

MR. BOYLES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I will say maybe perhaps in a moment of levity if this group would like for me to continue to be around I really do think we need to keep this thing on the schedule; otherwise, I won't be here. But the other thing about this, I'm wondering, Vince, if is this reluctance or this intransigence on moving this because of this management authority seems to be stuck in limbo in terms of the authority transfer?

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: To that point, Vince.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR O'SHEA: Mr. Chairman, that's not my sense. I think it's, you know, workload and demand of other species and the limit of what they can do and but I haven't picked up this other issue at all.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Louis.

DR. DANIEL: Yes, I think Vince is absolutely right and that is exactly what it is. There are so many species that need to go through that approach and here is one that NFMS isn't or not going to be responsible for much longer in terms of overfishing and so they want to, they're not as interested in it as they may have been before.

But you know, just this opportunity to bring the Gulf and the South Atlantic red drum experts together, you know, and try to resolve some of the issues we've argued about and discussed for years was just a real cool opportunity and I think we need to do everything we can to keep it going.

And just as an update while we're still on red drum,

we just got our red drum assessment update back from peer reviews. And the, if you will recall when we implemented Amendment 2 the technical committee told us that if we implemented these measures that we would likely achieve the 40 percent annual escapement rate.

And based on the model that we used pre-Amendment 2 where we were at I think it was 18 percent after implementing our interim plan which has been in effect longer than Amendment 2 has, because we did it in '98 I think the plan did it in 2002, but we achieved, the updated assessment was 41 percent escapement rate for.

And an additional model, the spreadsheet model which is one that Carmichael tends to like a little better is a little, is about 33 percent-34 percent. So we're bracketing around 33 to 41-42 percent, so good news.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Yes, I think all of us believed intuitively that we were going to get past you know that mark whenever we did what we did as a result of the last amendment. So, I did, you know, have a communication with John Carmichael and, you know, he confirmed that it's, you know that our assessment is still on the SEDAR schedule.

And we are proceeding with plans to have a joint meeting of the Gulf experts and our Atlantic experts hopefully sometime in the autumn of this year so that they can get together and have sort of a preliminary brainstorming session about methodology and data strengths and weaknesses and that sort of thing.

So we're actively working on that which hopefully will keep this in the forefront and keep it from falling off the radar screen. But it never hurts to keep following up with more affirmation of the importance of this.

Just briefly I'd like to give you all a little bit of an update on what is going on with the red drum long line survey. You all will recall it was a tortuous path to get to the point that we could actually start spending the money but fortunately the dam burst in November of 2006 which was a little late for the planned autumn season but Georgia and South Carolina were able to prosecute some sampling effort.

We had our permits in-hand and South Carolina in the fall of 2006 had 17 days of sampling with 92 sets and they caught 340 fish of which 22 were recaptures. And they had a documentation of a

northward movement of a fish that was tagged in the south which was sort of contrary to our paradigm that we – usually we either see no movement or we see a southerly movement so this was the first time we'd actually documented that.

North Carolina has had delays in getting their Section 7 permit but they are now in a situation where they're going to start prosecuting some sampling effort the remainder of this month and through the summer. In Georgia we, in November and December we had nine days in the field with 45 sets and we caught nine red drum. And thus far in April we've had four days with 17 sets but we've had zero catches but we have managed to break the bracket for the long line winch and Part 1 long line mainline. So Mr. Boyles, just hold on. Okay, go ahead.

MR. BOYLES: Mr. Chairman, sounds like you all don't know how to fish in Georgia.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: We say down south, "Them's fighting words." But we'll leave that to afterwards. We're a little down the learning curve from you all. You all have only got a decade or two on us of doing this so give us a few years and we'll be caught up with you. But we are proceeding ahead.

The money is being well spent. This is going to be a very important source of information to tune the red drum assessment in the future. This has been something that many of us in this room have advocated for, for years and years and years and it's very important to put this in place.

You know we're going to expand the Georgia sampling down into Northeast Florida once we sort of get our feed underneath us but, you know, hopefully it will provide a long-term data source if we can maintain the funding for it which is always a big challenge.

These things get a lot of attention and excitement in the first years and then they just sort of kind of fade away you know and they're not new and they're not sexy anymore. But we all know the importance of long-term fisheries independent surveys. So, any other questions about where we're at? Vince.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR O'SHEA: Yes, thanks, Mr. Chairman. You know actually I wish it was only a tortuous path to get this thing on the road. But you raised a good point about the trend data and I was wondering, this will be a topic for discussion at the Executive Committee tomorrow, the future of the ACFCMA plus-up.

So I was wondering, we have a couple of technical folks on this board or folks with technical background on this board, I wonder if you could just give a sense of how many years you think this data, you'd need to be collecting this data first before it would be useable and then, you know, when does it start being useable and how long would we need to continue it? And I'm not trying to argue for or against it but that would be a nice thing to have in our hip pocket tomorrow morning.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: I don't know. I think that's always a difficult question to answer. However, you know, I will certainly defer to some of our other experts if you have an opinion on that. I don't think there is any magic number that we use. I think a lot of times we'd like to see, you know, four or five years of a survey being done with a uniform methodology.

You know, I think one of our biggest challenges is unlike South Carolina who is sort of in the production phase we're still in the, sort of the R and D phase you know because we're trying to establish the baseline, sampling sites and survey design. And so we're going to, you know, Georgia and certainly North Carolina are going to be a little behind and then Florida.

But, you know, I would say that you know we'll probably be hard pressed to have enough data to make a meaningful difference in the next assessment because we're only talking a couple of years. But it will give us one more thing that we can use to sort of ground-truth. If we, you know, if we've got these escapement rates that we think we have, North Carolina has just documented theirs.

We think, you know, South Carolina and Georgia probably have had marked improvements in escapement. Florida has documented theirs. You know if we don't see in the long-term some stability or expansion in that spawning stock then that's telling us that something is flawed, you know, either our ability to measure escapement or in the use of that spawning potential ratio threshold.

So, Louis, we were talking about how many years would this long line survey have to be in place before it's going to be a useful tool and, you know, my comment was I don't know that there is any magic number but obviously more is better. But I think at this point, you know, it's going to take four or five years to have enough in-hand to get through the, sort of the piloting phase that we're doing in North

Carolina and Georgia and Florida to have anything meaningful. So, any other perspectives on that? Nobody wants to commit, Vince.

DR. DANIEL: We've had four years of our independent gillnet work and we're starting to generate some trends with our adult finfish assessment. And so I mean I would say that certainly seeing those five-year old fish moving into the long line survey, that's going to be some good evidence that you're seeing escapement.

And then if there is some way that we can characterize those on an annual basis and then see them moving through the system, that's going to help. And I'll be real curious to see if we start getting some of these thousands of adult tags that we've put out that we get very few recaps on and what kind of recovery rates we see in that sampling effort. So there is multiple benefits to it as just an index.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Yes, one other thing that I think would be an important point, Vince, is that this also is going to provide us a standardized mechanism to pull, periodically pull samples out of that spawning population for age determination and other biological sampling.

Right now we're sort of hitting it in fits and starts and this way it will be a uniform way of doing that. So in addition to the index of abundance you will have a mechanism to get collections to do other things with. So it's money I think, you know, obviously well spent.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR O'SHEA: And I'm not a scientist but I assume that the age samples that could be collected through a long line survey are going to be more random than if you tried to get them out of the fishery, out of, say, the recreational fishery, right?

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Right. And in fact at this point there is no way that we can even get biological samples because everybody's maximum size limit is well below the threshold for adulthood. So it's going to provide a source. Another thing just to point out is that the samples of adults we have taken sort of in fits and starts over the last few years, all that data has been provided to Mike Dennison with South Carolina.

And he is starting to look at relationships between year class, abundance in the adult stock and environmental factors. And he is seeing some pretty interesting relationships between La Nina and El Nino events and abundance of year classes in the

spawning stocks which may feed back in to how we use hatchery-reared run drum as a tool because obviously we don't necessarily want to dump hatchery-reared fish in conditions where we expect year, you know, wild fish year class strength to be good. So this is, you know, another benefit that has emerged out of that.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR O'SHEA: That's great. And I think just you know to maybe close this topic tomorrow at the Executive Committee you know each state has a member on that Executive Committee so I'd really, that's going to be an issue and we know it's an issue. And there are people that have their, you know, that have their eyes on that money so we want to have a good discussion there about what the alternatives are so the people that can be there to express that view would be important. Thank you for your time on this, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you, Vince. All right, Louis.

DR. DANIEL: What else are you catching in that survey? I mean does that provide additional – I mean I would think you would catch sharks maybe. Are you getting other information on other species that are important to ASMFC and then the councils?

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Yes. And that's a good point because we are prosecuting the sampling in the spring and summer as well specifically to leverage it to provide information on sharks. So it is feeding into some, you know, it's going to produce some very useful information for the development of the coastal shark plan. So that's another good, you know, a good selling point.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR O'SHEA: But no turtles.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Never seen a turtle on that kind of gear so that's just a, I think that's an urban myth. Any other comments? I want to thank Nichola for her hard work in coordinating these various red drum groups and keeping them moving along. It's always a challenge to do that.

OTHER BUSINESS

We'll move on to other business. I've got a topic that I mentioned in an e-mail to the board and interested parties that I'd like to just have a very brief discussion on. I know the hour is getting long but I got a little bit of feedback from some of the board members and interested parties via e-mail but I certainly want to open it up for this.

And, you know, over the years we have populated advisory panels as necessary to support the development of addendums and amendments to fishery management plans. And it oftentimes creates a situation where we have a real intense public involvement facet to our business and then these folks sort of go into a state of dormancy.

Sometimes they never come out of their dormancy; sometimes they're resurrected or redirected to another advisory panel. And with a few sidebar discussions over time I just think that we ought to consider developing one multi-species advisory panel that will have consistent advice. There is a lot of overlap in these fisheries.

I mean people who fish for red drum typically are fishing for spotted seatrout, probably interacting with spot, probably fishing for Spanish mackerel at some time during the year. So there is a lot of overlap. These are – it's rare that we have people who go out and fish just for one species and don't have an interest or knowledge about other species.

So, you know, my recommendation would be for us to consider developing a single multi-species advisory panel and looking at our two standing advisory panels which you've got the membership rosters have been provided to you and look at maybe consolidating those folks into this new AP as well as adding some folks if necessary. So, I want to put that idea out and get a little feedback from the board on that. It's tough when it's this late in the day. So that either means it's a bad idea or nobody really cares. Wilson. Okay, I can always count on Wilson.

DR. LANEY: Well, I support the idea, Mr. Chairman. I think it's a, you know, it makes things more efficient and it certainly moves us in the direction of ecosystem management approach, I think, if you're getting folks that can deal with a whole species complex. And we have, what, most of these are, except for the mackerels I guess, we've got a bunch of sciaenids that we're looking at. So I think there is a lot to be said for that approach. I would support that.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: I see Bill Windley out in the audience. Bill, would you come to the microphone and maybe give us the benefit of your perspective on this. Bill is involved in several of our advisory panels.

MR. BILL WINDLEY: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I had the opportunity to be on the Croaker Peer Review

Panel. And at the time it was pretty obvious that a lot of the information that exists on that species has been taken in groups of, you know, of – what is that word, Wilson? – sciaenid. Yes.

In the case of Virginia they have a lot of historic information that's classed as trash fish. Probably looking back on that we might be able to use some other you know data from those years to sort that out a little bit farther but there is very little independent data.

There is little enough that we were concerned about early on about even recommending anything south of Cape Hatteras in terms of croaker review. Just I think it became obvious to me at that time that there was a lot of independence in these fisheries and I would feel more comfortable on the review panel if I knew more about all of them.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you, Bill. Any other perspectives on that? I've asked Nichola to ask our "master of institutional knowledge" over here what we would actually have to do because this is sort of some new territory for me.

MS. MESERVE: I've been informed that right now we would just have to have consensus to go ahead and form a single AP and down the road we'll have to approve the nominations for this AP so no motion is necessary now.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Bob.

MR. BEAL: Just one other thought after I talked to Nichola, you know getting some, we could probably work with the states to kind of get a general idea of what this group should look like, in other words different gear sectors and different states and inshore/offshore and those sorts of things. And it will probably be a benefit down the road. Once we have kind of a skeleton of what this group should look like, then we can start populating those spots with names from the states.

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: The other issue, too, is obviously the fiscal implications because if we want to populate a multi-species AP and try to have it meet you know at least one time a year just so we can keep them aware and apprised of what is going on then that's something that we'll have to consider in the action plan and in the budget and that sort of thing, too, because a lot of times, you know, this board will go two or three years without even convening a meeting of an advisory panel so there will be some fiscal implications of this but I foresee

them being reasonable, I would think.

Fisheries Management Board adjourned on
Wednesday, May 9, 2007, at 6:05 o'clock, p.m.)

You know, as I said in my e-mail, I think the cost would be outweighed by the benefits. Any opposition to that? Do I see consensus from the board to moving forward with this multi-species AP concept? I see a lot of up and down head nodding so thank you and we will move ahead and be reporting on this in the future. All right.

Our next item of other business is the board chair rotation. I have been told that I am living on borrowed time which I've been told that many times before. But in terms of being chair of the South Atlantic Board my time is technically up. And it's time to look at a shift of leadership. Robert Boyles Jr. from South Carolina is our current vice chair; however, Robert, obviously, will be ascending to chair for the full commission in the not-too-distant future and so we have a little bit of a situation here.

And I have been in discussions with our Florida colleagues and they have promised to step up to the table. They're in a bit of a transition right now sorting out exactly who is going to have responsibilities on the commission for the state of Florida in terms of an administrative commissioner so, but they have promised and will have something at our next meeting in the autumn to deal with transitions. So, any other business to come before the South Atlantic Board? Roy.

MR. ROY MILLER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I'll be very brief. It's just a quick offer. We have an awful lot of fisheries independent trawl survey information, juvenile trawls since 1980 and a 30-foot bottom trawl data since 1989 that, as you might guess, there is a lot of spot and croaker information in there, virtually none on spotted seatrout, but for those two species. To the extent that that data is not available to this particular board I would like to make it available and can offer a contact person in that regard. Thanks.

ADJOURN

CHAIRMAN WOODWARD: Thank you very much. We'll pass that. Joe is here and I'm sure he'll be in contact with you to find out how to mine that data out of your catacombs and make it available so that we can have full disclosure and full deliberations on this. Any other business? Well, thank you for staying here late and with no other business we stand adjourned.

(Whereupon, the South Atlantic State-Federal