

Chairman's Report

February 2024 Business Meeting

Document	Page
State Ethics Education Reminder	25
2024 Annual Meeting Calendar	26
Committee Assignments and MFC Workplan	27
Regional and Standing Advisory Committee Reports	30
Joint Meeting of the MFC Commercial Resources Fund Committee & the Funding Committee for N.C. Commercial Fishing Resource Fund	60



EDUCATION REQUIREMENTS FOR PUBLIC SERVANTS

Public Servants must complete the Ethics and Lobbying Education program provided by the N.C. State Ethics Commission within **six months** of their election, appointment, or employment. We recommend that this be completed as soon as possible, but the training must be repeated every two years after the initial session.

Since Adobe Flash was terminated on December 31, 2020, our online program is not available. A new and shorter online program will be available in the near future. The new program will be compatible with portable devices such as phones and tablets.

Live webinar presentations are being offered monthly and registration information for the live presentations can be found [here](#). These presentations are about 90 minutes long and give you the opportunity to ask questions of the speaker.

For questions or additional information concerning the Ethics Education requirements, please contact Dottie Benz at (919) 389-1383.

Marine Fisheries Commission 2024 Calendar

Dates are subject to change.

January						
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2024 MFC Meeting Dates

MFC Business Meetings	Northern Regional AC	Southern Regional AC
February 21-23	January 9	January 10
May 22-24	April 9	April 10
August 21-23	July 9	July 10
November 20-22	October 8	October 9

Shellfish/Crustacean Standing AC	Finfish Standing AC	Habitat and Water Quality Standing AC
January 11	January 16	January 17
April 11	April 16	April 17
July 11	July 16	July 17
October 10	October 15	October 16

Calendar Key

	MFC		Northern Regional AC
	ASMFC		Southern Regional AC
	SAFMC		Shellfish/Crustacean Standing AC
	MAFMC		Finfish Standing AC
	State Holiday		Habitat and Water Quality Standing AC

2023 Committee Assignments for Marine Fisheries Commissioners

08/31/2023

FINFISH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Statutorily required standing committee comprised of commissioners and advisers that considers matters related to finfish.

Commissioners: Tom Roller – co-chair, Mike Blanton – vice chair

DMF Staff Lead: Lee Paramore - lee.paramore@deq.nc.gov

Meeting Frequency: Can meet quarterly, depending on assignments from MFC

HABITAT AND WATER QUALITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Statutorily required standing committee comprised of commissioners and advisers that considers matters concerning habitat and water quality that may affect coastal fisheries resources.

Commissioners: Doug Rader – chair, Sarah Gardner– vice chair

DMF Staff Lead: Anne Deaton - anne.deaton@deq.nc.gov

Meeting Frequency: Committee can meet quarterly, depending on assignments from MFC. CHPP Steering Committee can meet a couple of times a year.

SHELLFISH/CRUSTACEAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Statutorily required standing committee comprised of commissioners and advisers that considers matters concerning oysters, clams, scallops and other molluscan shellfish, shrimp and crabs.

Commissioners: Mike Blanton – chair, Ryan Bethea – co-chair

DMF Staff Lead: Tina Moore - tina.moore@deq.nc.gov

Meeting Frequency: Can meet quarterly, depending on assignments from MFC

CONSERVATION FUND COMMITTEE

Committee comprised of commissioners that makes recommendations to the MFC for administering funds to be used for marine and estuarine resources management, including education about the importance of conservation.

Commissioners: Doug Rader - chair, and Robert McNeill

DMF Staff Lead: Steve Poland – steve.poland@ncdenr.gov

Meeting Frequency: Meets as needed

LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CIVIL PENALTY COMMITTEE

Statutorily required committee comprised of commissioners that makes final agency decisions on civil penalty remission requests.

Commissioners: Rob Bizzell - chair, Donald Huggins – co-chair

DMF Staff Lead: Col. Carter Witten – carter.witten@deq.nc.gov

Meeting Frequency: Meets as needed

COASTAL RECREATIONAL FISHING LICENSE TRUST COMMITTEE

Committee consisting of the three recreational seats and the science seat to provide the DMF advice on the projects and grants issued using Coastal Recreational Fishing License trust funds.

Commissioners: Robert McNeill– chair, Rob Bizzell, Tom Roller, and Doug Rader

DMF Staff Lead: Paula Farnell – paula.farnell@deq.nc.gov

Meeting Frequency: Meets as needed

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

Committee comprised of commissioners that makes recommendations to the MFC on at-large and obligatory nominees for the Mid- and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils.

Commissioners: Robert McNeill – chair, Tom Roller – vice chair, Donald Huggins, Sammy Corbett

DMF Staff Lead: Chris Batsavage - chris.batsavage@deq.nc.gov

Meeting Frequency: Typically meets once a year

STANDARD COMMERCIAL FISHING LICENSE ELIGIBILITY BOARD

Statutorily required three-person board consisting of DEQ, DMF and MFC designees who apply eligibility criteria to determine whether an applicant is eligible for a SCFL.

Commission Designee: Mike Blanton

DMF Staff Lead: Marine Patrol Capt. Garland Yopp – garland.yopp@deq.nc.gov

Meeting Frequency: Meets two to three times a year, could need to meet more often depending on volume of applications

N.C. COMMERCIAL FISHING RESOURCE FUND COMMITTEE

Committee comprised of commissioners that the commission has given authority to make funding decisions on projects to develop and support sustainable commercial fishing in the state.

Commissioners: Sammy Corbett - chair, Mike Blanton - vice chair, Ryan Bethea

DMF Staff Lead: William Brantley – william.brantley@deq.nc.gov

Meeting Frequency: Meets two to three times a year

WRC/MFC JOINT COMMITTEE ON DELINEATION OF FISHING WATERS

Committee formed to help integrate the work of the two commissions as they fulfill their statutory responsibilities to jointly determine the boundaries that define North Carolina's Inland, Coastal and Joint Fishing Waters as the agencies go through a statutorily defined periodic review of existing rules.

MFC Commissioners: Rob Bizzell, Donald Huggins, Sarah Gardner

DMF Staff Lead: Anne Deaton - anne.deaton@deq.nc.gov

Meeting Frequency: Meets as needed

SHELLFISH CULTIVATION LEASE REVIEW COMMITTEE

Three-member committee formed to hear appeals of decisions of the Secretary regarding shellfish cultivation leases issued under G.S. 113-202.

MFC Commissioners: Rob Bizzell

DMF Staff Lead:

Meeting Frequency: Meets as needed

COASTAL HABITAT PROTECTION PLAN STEERING COMMITTEE

The CHPP Steering Committee, which consists of two commissioners from the Marine Fisheries, Coastal Management and Environmental Management commissions reviews and approves the plan, recommendations, and implementation actions.

MFC Commissioners: Doug Rader, Donald Huggins

DMF Staff Lead: Anne Deaton – anne.deaton@deq.nc.gov

Meeting Frequency: Meets as needed

Marine Fisheries Commission 2023-2025 WORKPLAN

INCORPORATING ACTIVITY UNDERWAY AND UPCOMING ASSESSMENTS

General Timelines and Abbreviations							(See
"General Timelines" worksheet for details, Colored blocks below indicate MFC Action Point							
Fishery Management Plans	(SA)	SAR	GO	(PD)	AC/Pub	PMO	A
	Stock Assessment In Progress	Stock Assessment Report Presented to MFC	Vote to Approve Goal and Objectives	Initial Plan Development by DMF/FMP AC	Advisory Committee and Public Review	Select Preferred Management Options	Vote on Final Approval
Non-FMP Rule Development	R	IP	PR	RLO	PRL		
	Request Issue Development	Information Paper In-Progress	Decision to pursue rulemaking	Issue paper with rule language options In-Progress	Select Preferred Rule Language		
Rulemaking	FA	NOT	NCR/PH/PC	A			
	Fiscal Analysis In-Progress	Approve Notice of Text	Publish in NC Register/Hold Public Hearing&Comment Period	MFC Review Public Comment & Vote on Approval			
MFC Committee Activity	APR	JUL					
	Meeting confirmed and scheduled	Meeting anticipated					

Quarterly Business Meeting

Topic	DMF Staff Lead(s)	Nov - 23	Feb - 24	May - 24	Aug - 24	Nov - 24	Feb - 25	May - 25	Aug - 25
Stock Assessments									
Southern Flounder Stock Assessment Update	Schlick	(SA)	(SA)	SAR					
Blue Crab Stock Assessment Update	Schlick	(SA)	(SA)						
Active Management Plans									
Striped Mullet FMP Amendment 2	Zapf/Dobbs	AC/Pub	PMO	A					
Spotted Seatrout FMP Amendment 1	Behringer/Pensing	(PD)		AC/Pub	PMO	A			
Hard Clam/Oyster	Dobbs/Facendola	G/O	(PD)		AC/Pub	PMO	A		
Status of Commission Requests									
Update False Albacore Issue Paper	Seward/Markwith	RLO	PRL						
Pot Marking Requirements Issue Paper	Blum	RLO	PRL						
Federal Permits - Review Feasibility of State Requirements	Murphey/Batsavage/Witten/Poland/Klibansky				IP	PR			
Rulemaking									
18A Rule Readoption - Shellfish Sanitation (85 rules)	Blum/Walsh/Subject Matter Experts	A							
Data Collection and Harassment Prevention for the Conservation of Marine and Estuarine Resources (5 rules)	Blum/Walsh/Subject Matter Experts			A					
Oyster Sanctuary Rule Changes (1 rule)	Blum/Walsh/Subject Matter Experts			A					
Conforming Rule Changes for Shellfish Relay Program and Shellfish Leases and Franchises (12 rules)	Blum/Walsh/Subject Matter Experts			A					
MFC Committees Meetings									
(Meeting date(s) in cell)									
Nominating Committee	Batsavage/Blum	11-Oct				October			
Shellfish Cultivation Lease Review Committee	Reynolds								
CHPP Steering Committee	Rader/Blanton/Huggins								
Advisory Committees Activity Overview									
(Meeting date(s) in cell)			In-Person	In-Person	In-person	In-Person	In-Person	In-Person	In-person
Northern Regional Advisory	Godwin/Paramore		JAN	APR	JUL	OCT	JAN	APR	JUL
Southern Regional Advisory	Moore/Stewart		JAN	APR	JUL	OCT	JAN	APR	JUL
Finfish Standing Advisory	Paramore/Rock	No meetings	JAN	APR	JUL	OCT	JAN	APR	JUL
Shellfish/Crustacean Standing Advisory	Moore/Deaton		JAN	APR	JUL	OCT	JAN	APR	JUL
Habitat and Water Quality Standing Advisory	Deaton/Harrison		JAN	APR	JUL	OCT	JAN	APR	JUL



ROY COOPER
Governor

ELIZABETH S. BISER
Secretary

KATHY B. RAWLS
Director

February 2, 2024

MEMORANDUM

TO: Marine Fisheries Commission
Northern Regional Advisory Committee

FROM: Charlton Godwin, Biologist Supervisor
Lee Paramore, Northern District Manager
Fisheries Management Section

SUBJECT: Meeting of the Marine Fisheries Commission's Northern Regional Advisory Committee to provide recommendations for management options for Marine Fisheries Commission Consideration on draft Amendment 2 to the Striped Mullet Fishery Management Plan

The Marine Fisheries Commission's (MFC) Northern Regional Advisory Committee (AC) held a hybrid meeting on Jan. 18, 2024, at the Dare County Administration Building in Manteo. The meeting was also live streamed on YouTube. Advisory Committee members could attend in person or on WebEx and could communicate with other committee members.

The following AC members were in attendance in person: Melissa Clark, Herman Dunbar, Carl Hacker, Thomas Newman, Jonathan Worthington. The following AC members were in attendance on WebEx: Everett Blake, Roger Rulifson. The following AC members were absent: Keith Bruno, Jamie Lane, Allan Martin, Sara Winslow.

The following Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) staff were in attendance: Kathy Rawls, Carter Witten, Edward Mann, Chris Lee, Steve Poland, Lee Paramore, Charlton Godwin, Corrin Flora, Hope Wade, Debbie Manley, Dan Zapf, Jeff Dobbs, Willow Patten, Rick Crawshaw, Haley Clinton.

Public: Twenty-seven members of the public attended in person and 17 viewers watched on YouTube. Nine members of the public provided public comment.

The Northern Regional AC had seven members in attendance and a quorum was met.

Northern Regional AC Vice-Chair Everette Blake called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND APPROVAL OF APRIL 12, 2023 MEETING MINUTES

A motion was made by Thomas Newman to approve the agenda for the meeting with a change in order of business to have Public Comment moved to after the staff presentation and before the AC deliberation and vote on Management Options. Second by Melissa Clark. The motion passed by unanimous consent.

A motion was made by Jonathan Worthington to approve the minutes from the Northern Regional AC meeting held on April 12, 2023, with the correction that Carl Hacker attended virtually only. Second by Thomas Newman. The motion passed by unanimous consent.

MARINE FISHERIES COMMISSION UPDATE

A memo was provided in the AC's briefing materials updating them on the actions taken during the MFC's November 2023 business meeting.

REVIEW STRIPED MULLET FMP DRAFT AMENDMENT 2 AND AC DISCUSSION

Division staff Jeff Dobbs and Willow Patten provided a review of the Striped Mullet Decision Document. The Decision Document outlines the Goals and Objectives of the FMP and lays out the Sustainable Harvest Options for the commercial fishery that will end overfishing and rebuild the striped mullet spawning stock biomass to a sustainable level. The data used to quantify harvest reductions are collected from commercial fishermen through the trip ticket and the Division's fish house sampling programs. Because they are quantifiable, commercial harvest reductions are used to meet the legal requirements of the Fisheries Reform Act to address overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks. Because harvest reductions from the recreational fishery are not quantifiable, sustainable harvest options are specific to the commercial fishery, where most striped mullet harvest occurs. A 21.3 to 35.4% reduction in commercial harvest relative to commercial landings in 2019 is needed to rebuild the striped mullet spawning stock biomass to a sustainable level.

Commercial Fishery Options

The management options to meet reductions in the commercial fishery relative to landings in 2019 included: Option 1: Size Limit Options; Option 2: Season Closure Options; Option 3: Trip Limits; Option 4: Day of Week Closures; Option 5: Combinations of Season and Day of Week Closures; Option 6: Stop Net Fishery Management; Option 7: Seasonal Catch Limits; Option 8: Area Closures; Option 9: Limited Entry; and Option 10: Adaptive Management.

Recreational Fishery Options

The intent of these management options is to allow traditional use of striped mullet in the recreational fishery while supporting sustainability objectives. Due to recreational fishery data collection methods and recreational fishery practices, it is not possible to calculate harvest reductions from the proposed management options. While recreational harvest currently accounts for only a small percentage of the striped mullet harvest, there is concern that the reduced availability of commercially harvested bait could lead to a significant shift in directed recreational harvest. The proposed options will reduce the potential for that type of shift and therefore support meeting the sustainability objectives successfully.

The Management Options for the recreational fishery included: Option 1: Recreational Bag Limit; and Option 2: For Hire Vessel and Bag Limit.

AC Discussion

AC member Jon Worthington asked if there had been any more sampling for mullet north of Harkers Island? In Albemarle Sound? Staff indicated yes. Jon asked if there was an economic analysis completed on the recreational use of mullet and the impact of closures and reductions? Staff indicated the data was not sufficient to complete an economic analysis on just the recreational harvest and use as bait. Staff explained the data gaps associated with estimates of recreational use either from bait landed commercially or from recreational cast net harvest. Staff indicated the recreational use of mullet for bait was a very small percentage of total mullet landings.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Nine members of the public spoke.

Steve House-Dare County Commissioner. Commented that the economic impact presented in the FMP is inadequate and does not meet the requirements of the Fisheries Reform Act. We have had several done for the county and each one has a final number of the actual impacts to income and also how many people are impacted. Also, the stock assessment the final year is 2019. There is no way we can work off data that is four years old. You need to have more recent data than that.

Chris Greene-Wanted to know how many recreational anglers received citations that were issued for illegal possession during the recreational closure? He feels the way the regulation was rolled out didn't inform the public about the changes. Thinks the Division could have done better at informing the public of the change. We should not have been writing citations for this regulation change.

Tracy Shisler-I don't understand how you get recreational fisherman's data. Fish houses have to turn in a trip ticket weekly, so I don't understand how we don't have the data we need from this sector. Staff indicated that we presume that bait shops that buy mullet directly from commercial fishermen are using all of those mullet for bait. Staff responded that the fish houses are the ones that may not fill out the trip ticket to indicate if the landings were used as bait or otherwise. That is where the data gap is. Tracy asked about the habitat discussions in the FMP. Asked if we were working with other agencies about the destruction of critical habitat, such as rampant building on the coast that may degrade spawning habitat and nursery habitat. Staff indicated this is where the FMPs link up with our Coastal Habitat Protection Plan and in that plan we outline how we work with other agencies to try and protect and restore critical habitat. Tracy asked if we could determine the exact level that habitat destruction impacts the mullet stock relative to fishing? Staff indicated we do not have data to determine what that level.

Mike Langowski-Frisco mullet fishing for 60 years. Third rodeo and recalled 1986 and 1991. In 1986 this was started to the tackle shop owners for years I sold to tackle shops. Yes, they must have trip tickets filled out. This isn't being done? Staff indicated that yes, we get that data but that is only a segment of the commercial harvest that may go for recreational fishing. You are shutting down my fishery for bait to the tackle shops. I've gone back and looked back at data to 1917 and 1945. Needed food to feed the troops in Europe. After all was said and done, they did a study that indicated no harm was done with all that harvest. In all my years of fishing since 1966 until the 1980s there was more mullet caught in Dare County and Harkers Island. I would go down at Christmas to Wilmington and haul seine off the beach and catch more mullet in a week than you say we can have now. Taken red drum away and talking about taking away speckled trout. More mullet now than there has been in 50 years.

Tami Gray-I'm trying to get an idea of where your data comes from too? Raise your hand if any of you guys go out on boats to fish for mullet? And where do you guys at DMF go? Staff indicated we have staff go out all over the state to collect our data. We have crews in all coastal counties that go out four days a week. Tami asked about how many yards of net we set and how we set nets. Staff indicated that specifics are available on all our studies and we can discuss that separately but it will take more than three minutes. Staff indicated this information is also available in our annual FMP updates. Staff indicated we would be glad to discuss all of our independent sampling. Staff indicated we would also be glad to actually take people out to see our sampling if they would like. We have actually taken out commission members to see our sampling.

David Warren-I mullet fished since mid 1990s. Not only fished NC but also fished Florida. What's interesting is in Florida with all the fishermen there they did away with the weekend closures and the 10-day closure they had in the wintertime. But there is more mullet now than it was in 1990s. It was harder to catch mullet then than now. There are less fishermen, the market is taking care of it. The Asian roe market had declined. If you're using 2019 data, you're using the wrong data. Because the market is not as lucrative as it used to be, I don't go mullet fishing as much anymore. Here to support my friends.

Reese Stecher-Can I ask a few quick questions before my three minutes starts, used to be five minutes. Have the surrounding states, Virginia and South Carolina, closed their mullet fishery? Staff responded no, not that they were aware. Next question is it true that there was a record catch this year for poundage for a single set down south? Staff asked if he is talking about the stop net fishery? Yes, there was a single catch of 76,000 pounds, but not sure if it is a record. Reese thanked the commercial fisherman that supply recreational fishery with mullet. We have only two or three fish left that are not overfished. All others are overfished. We need to see how much grant money you guys get for having fish on the overfished list. I know once you put a fish on the overfished list there has to be a group set up to recover the fish and have a time period for recovery. Is there is Federal Grant money coming to N.C. for overfished species? Staff corrected that statement; the Division does get Federal Grant money to help manage fisheries, but that money has nothing to do with whether the fish is listed as overfished or not. Reese-you guys are putting these folks out of business. There's more mullet out there than I've ever seen. It's so frustrating.

John Machie-In 2019 landings were down, people were doing other things. Still uses 2019 data on a fish that matures in two years. Got your foot in the door and are trying to take mullet from us. Never give us anything back. Staff explained there was a lack of sampling during Covid and there are data streams missing in 2020 and 2021.

Cara Eakes-I own a tackle shop, lot of these fishermen are my friends. They are making bills, house payments, plans for the future. If I don't have fresh bait, I don't sell anything else in the shop. I think reasonability has gone out the window. Need to look at how this economy is treating every one of us.

6:43 public comment was closed as no one else wished to speak.

VOTE TO RECOMMEND MANAGEMENT OPTIONS FOR MFC CONSIDERATION

Staff started presenting the commercial options from the Sustainable Harvest Issue Paper. Staff noted the DMF recommendation was 5.n, the Southern AC's recommendation was 5.n, and the Finfish AC's recommendation was 5.a. Staff pointed out these selections for this are also tied to the stop net portion. Staff also noted the Adaptive Management Framework at the end needed to be reviewed. Both the Southern and Finfish ACs supported the Adaptive Management framework in Option 10. Thomas Newman noted that he was on the Striped Mullet FMP AC Workshop, and pointed out the stop net reduction was only discussed if there was a commercial quota. They were not looking at a quota for the stop net fishery only.

Sustainable Harvest Commercial Fishery

Thomas Newman made a motion to support 5.a and 6.a. Motion seconded by Wayne Dunbar.

Everette Blake asked for clarification from a tackle shop owner on how long fresh mullet would last. Would it last through a weekend closure? Just wanted to make sure about that question before voting. There was no more discussion. A tackle owner stated mullet would last over a weekend closure.

Motion passes 6-1.

The Vice-Chair asked the AC members if they wanted to discuss the Adaptive Management. There was no discussion so the AC moved to discussing the recreational fishery management measures. The AC did not make a recommendation for Adaptive management.

Recreational Fishery Management Options

After hearing no recommendations from the AC, the Vice-Chair asked if since we are not hearing a request for any specific management offer would we simply default to status quo which would be Option

I or take this as a no vote for any option. After hearing no discussion, the Northern AC did not make a recommendation for the recreational fishery options for the Striped Mullet FMP. The Vice-Chair recognized the Northern AC is not taking a vote for the recreational management Options. Jon Worthington added to state ‘as presented’.

AC member Jon Worthington stated that he feels they cannot vote due to the process not being followed. There was no economic analysis. We have heard a lot of concern from tackle shop owners. We are using data from 2019 and it’s not our fault that we could not sample in 2020 and 2021 and have no data. They have given us a statute that Marine Patrol cannot enforce.

The Vice-Chair clarified that the Northern AC chooses not to support any of the recreational recommendations and will not be voting on this particular issue. The Vice-Chair noted that they were close to concluding their work for this meeting and asked if there is anything else members wanted to talk about relative to coastal habitat or future scientific studies regarding the FMP that could be addressed before closing out discussion?

The Director was recognized and asked that the Vice-Chair may want to further consider the Adaptive management Framework with the AC to make sure they are aware of what is contained in the Adaptive Management as proposed. Staff explained that Adaptive Management simply allows the Division to react more quickly to new information that may come about relative to mullet stock status. If we do not have the Adaptive Management framework, once we get a stock assessment update for example, we would have to reopen the plan, rather than acting more quickly using Adaptive Management if it were passed as part of the plan. The stock assessment is scheduled to be updated at least once between amendments. It is possible the upcoming assessment will have a terminal year of 2024 with the assessment completed in 2025. Whatever the outcome of the assessment, whether the stock has improved or declined, if Adaptive Management were adopted, the Division could react more quickly to the assessment update without having to reopen the plan which would take much longer.

Everette Blake asked looking at the way this is written, I would almost prefer to see some different targets laid out. I’m a sales guy and get asked every day if I go from 500 to 400 or 500 to 600 employees what do you charge me then. I would like to see this because I see mullet everywhere. How quickly could we see one or two years of a recovering fishery and then take the Saturday-Sunday closure away? What would that take for us to see? Staff indicated that would require a stock assessment update. Staff also added that all the projections indicated the stock could recover very quickly. That is why we want the Adaptive Management in place so if we do see the stock recover, we could convene the industry workgroup and have discussions to relax regulations. We want to be able to have those conversations with the industry on how to manage a recovered stock. Staff indicated if they must reopen the plan to change management it takes around two years instead of much more quickly through Adaptive Management.

Thomas Newman stated that Adaptive Management is a good thing, but we are not using it now. We have lots of evidence from the Division data and landings that the stock has increased since 2019, and yet the DMF is still recommending that we take the most severe reduction. We are not using that information now, so why would we expect the Division to use it in the future.

Jon Worthington stated that we need to take some of these CRFL funds and funnel them off to some of our universities to help with studies for mullet. There were additional discussions about using 2019 data and not having more recent data. We have to do something to promote the public to believe what you are saying. We need more transparency between the Division and the public. Staff did mention that the stock assessment was peer reviewed by an outside panel of experts in stock assessment modeling and biology and life history of striped mullet in a public forum. The reviewers were from other agencies and universities outside the Division. They thoroughly reviewed and asked questions about all the data that goes into the model. The experts at the peer review workshop also worked with Division staff to come up with the best model to represent the mullet stock in North Carolina. All those workshops were open to the

public and we got very little participation from the public. Staff also mentioned we would be glad to take people out on the water with us when we conduct our sampling, so every step is transparent throughout the process.

No additional motion or discussion was provided from the AC.

Updates from DMF Staff

Lee Paramore pointed out that in the AC's packet they were given a written update on the MFC November business meeting and what was going on with all the FMPs. It was highlighted that coming up in March we are having a flounder symposium. This is the first one of these we've done. University researchers and agency staff will be there to provide an update on studies being conducted in North Carolina on southern flounder. We will be providing the public more information as it gets closer. The symposium will be in New Bern on March 20. The next Northern AC meeting is in April and the agenda will be determined based on what the MFC does at its February business meeting. The Vice-Chair asked if there was a location for the April AC meeting yet? Staff indicated that we were thinking it would be between Manteo or Washington. The location of the meeting may be informed by the agenda for the meeting.

ISSUES FROM AC MEMBERS

Thomas Newman pointed out that we need to have the MFC resume having meetings in Dare County. We have not had an MFC meeting here in years. Dare county is the powerhouse for both commercial and recreational fisheries. I don't know who sets the meeting locations, but I think it may be the chair. We would have a lot of public come to these meetings if they were closer to the northern part of the state. I want to put it on public record that we need to resume having meetings in Dare County. Staff indicated we would make a point of this in the minutes.

Thomas Newman proceeded to make a motion that the Marine Fisheries Commission start having meetings in Dare County again. Second by Jon Worthington. The motion passed by unanimous consent.

APPROVAL TO ADJOURN

The meeting was adjourned at 7:21.



ROY COOPER
Governor

ELIZABETH S. BISER
Secretary

KATHY B. RAWLS
Director

January 29, 2024

MEMORANDUM

TO: Marine Fisheries Commission
Southern Regional Advisory Committee

FROM: Chris Stewart, Biologist Supervisor
Tina Moore, Southern District Manager
Fisheries Management Section

SUBJECT: Meeting of the Marine Fisheries Commission’s Southern Regional Advisory Committee, Jan. 10, 2024 to provide recommendations for management options for Marine Fisheries Commission Consideration on draft Amendment 2 to the Striped Mullet Fishery Management Plan

The Marine Fisheries Commission’s (MFC) Southern Regional Advisory Committee (AC) held a meeting on Jan. 10, 2024, at the Department of Environmental Quality Wilmington Regional Office, Wilmington, North Carolina and via webinar. Advisory Committee members could attend in either setting and communicate with other committee members.

The following Advisory Committee members were in attendance: Fred Scharf, Tom Smith, Samuel (Sam) Boyce, Jason Fowler (online), Jeff Harrel (online), Jeremy Skinner, Truby Proctor, Pam Morris (online), Kenneth Siegler, Michael Yates (Absent – Tim Wilson).

Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) Staff: Chris Stewart, Tina Moore, Kathy Rawls, Jeff Dobbs, Willow Patten, Dan Zapf, Brandi Salmon, Corrin Flora, Hope Wade, Garland Yopp, Ashley Bishop, Carter Witten, Debbie Manley, Anne Deaton, Jesse Bisette, Alexander Batchelder, Genny Ivec, Savannah Starling. Kim, Hardison

Public: Glenn Skinner, Lee Parsons, Joe Romano, Taylor Barefoot, Adam Child, Bob Parish, Luke Ingraham, Jack Spruill, Andy Wood, Sheel Patel, Bonnie Monleone. Thirty-nine viewers watched on YouTube.

The Southern Regional AC had ten members present at the start of the meeting and a quorum was met.

Southern Regional AC Chair Fred Scharf called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. The Chair opened the floor for the AC members and DMF staff to provide introductions.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Fred Scharf asked the AC members if they approved of moving public comment after the Striped Mullet FMP draft Amendment 2 discussion but before the Southern AC votes on recommendations.

A motion was made to approve the modified agenda by Tom Smith. Second by Sam Boyce. The motion passed without objection.

A motion was made to approve the minutes from the Southern Regional AC meeting held on Apr. 12, 2023. Motion by Jason Fowler to approve the minutes. Second by Sam Boyce. The motion passed without objection.

STRIPED MULLET FMP DRAFT AMENDMENT 2

Discussion of Draft Amendment 2

Jeff Dobbs noted a full presentation on the management options is available online and today would be a verbal discussion following the Decision Document as part of the digital materials sent to the group and posted online. Dobbs said today's action item is to provide a recommendation to the MFC for Striped Mullet FMP Amendment 2 to achieve sustainable harvest. A 21.3 to 35.4% reduction in commercial harvest relative to commercial landings in 2019 is needed to rebuild the stock and end overfishing. Management options include season closures, size limit, trip limits, day of week options as well as combinations of various options. The DMF recommendation is for a day of the week trip limits (Option 5.n. – Jan. 1-31 and Nov. 16 – Dec. 31 50 lb., Sat-Sun 50 lb, Feb. 1 – Oct. 15 500 lb.) with as stop net catch cap (Option 6.b. – 30,000 lb. annual catch cap). Scharf asked about the measures put in place for 2023 as part of the supplement. Dobbs noted that an immediate reduction was needed; the division opted for regional season closures. However, fishermen indicated the 2023 season closures were difficult, particularly in the southern region. Therefore, for Amendment 2 DMF recommended a combination of management measures to achieve sustainable harvest while still allowing harvest to occur and reduced discards. Seigler noted there would be an abundance of discards with a 500-pound trip limit. Dobbs said trip limits would not occur during the roe fishery and would limit discards. Typically, the fish houses are not asking for high volume during this time. The meat and bait market demands are also lower during this time. Hopefully people will not change their gear configuration and fishing practices. Trip limits would only occur on Saturday and Sunday.

Smith indicated that has sat on three striped mullet FMPs now and each time we have done the bare minimum, basically catching the last fish that could be caught. We keep spinning our wheels and more needs to be done to increase escapement and rebuild the population. Several AC members agreed simpler is better and easier to enforce. Dobbs indicated at the options being presented came out of the workshop and that stakeholder indicated they didn't want complete season closures. The division wanted to do everything we could to reduce the impact to the roe fishery; however, we wanted to take an extremely conservative approach. Seigler said he would feel more comfortable with a minimum mesh size limit and felt that any reductions gained on Saturday and Sunday would be recouped the following week. Seigler further noted that if you went to a 1 3/8-inch bar mesh in a gill net it would allow escapement and those fish would contribute to the spawning stock for the next two years. Dobbs indicated gear restrictions are on the table. Scharf asked what was discussed regarding gear restrictions at the mullet workshop. Dobbs noted that the Striped Mullet AC was concerned mesh restrictions would impact other fisheries such as the white perch and sea mullet fisheries. More information can be found gill net issue paper.

Boyce asked about adaptive management, specifically how it would be applied between plans. He further noted that in year four it didn't make sense to implement it. Dobbs noted that if stock conditions change, we can make changes without reopening the plan. Flora noted the same language has been used in multiple plans. It's less prescriptive, we could do it twice if need be. We have a limited number of assessment biologists and the more prescriptive we get, the more our hands are tied. If the indices say we are doing good based on the annual FMP update, then we wouldn't need to do anything. Boyce said the wording made it sound like the stock would be assessed multiple times between reviews. Staff further noted that a

benchmark assessment occurs when more surveys are added to the assessment or other major changes occur; however, updates occur only when new data is added to the already existing data streams in the last assessment. Updates can shorten the time it takes to assess a stock. Dobbs went on to add that if the stock is recovered within two years, management would be loosened. Flora added the FMP update could be used to assess the stock as many of the indices used in the assessment are updated on an annual basis to monitor the stock. Dobbs further noted that if the target is not met, adaptive management gives us the ability to make changes during the 5-year cycle.

Boyce expressed his concern that when most recreational fishermen run out of bait, their 50 fish, they would only go out and get 50 more and it would be very difficult for Marine Patrol to enforce this measure. Therefore, he recommended that the division should conduct more messaging to explain why this is in place, so the public understands. Flora noted one of the objectives of the plan is public outreach and division would post best fishing practices to reduce discard mortality for the recreational fishery. Seigler asked how the fish limit was determined. Patten said the MRIP data showed that recreational fishermen landed less than 50 mullet. Seigler indicated that he would like to see the limit lower. Smith said fishermen use mullet for a lot of different things and that live bait is also a big part of fishery.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Glenn Skinner - Executive Director of the North Carolina Fisheries Association, and commercial fisherman – I have fished the roe mullet fishery for 30 years. Commercial landings have increased dramatically since the stock assessment has been completed. The 2022 fishing year had the fifth highest landings on record. Not only are our landings increasing, but the division’s surveys are also increasing. The electrofishing data was not used in the stock assessment it is seeing large amounts of fish. The stock is rapidly expanding, and we are seeing larger fish. Some fish are as old as 3 years, indicating the stock is expanding. We saw much larger fish this year. We are currently not fishing at a very high rate and when the environmental conditions are right you see increases like this. Last year we had several 10,000 pounds sets. Which is all our nets would hold. We need to keep this simple and be equitable for everyone. Let’s do a weekend closure, it meets the reduction needed and treats everyone the same no matter what fishery you are in. This stock is rapidly expanding based on the data I’ve seen; it is not overfished. Regarding the spawning stock biomass, we caught more fish last year than the stock assessment says exists. We need more data.

Taylor Barefoot – Commercial fishermen from Wilmington – I agree with Glenn, it needs to be cut and dry, no 500 pounds one day and 50 pounds another. The 500-pound trip limit doesn’t work for Spanish, you can’t control what hits the net. We need to go to the weekend closure. We can’t divide the state into two different halves, it’s not fair. We as fishermen need to work together to find a solution that works for everyone. Commercial fishermen need to make a living and provide for our families.

Lee Parsons – Charter boat captain for hire, recreational fisherman, has a major in marine technology and a minor in marine biology – I also have been a commercial fisherman in the strike net mullet fishery for roe. As a biologist, I have a problem with the roe fishery, you can’t build the population back up if you keep taking the babies. I can live with 50 fish per trip, I can get other things to use as bait. It takes me 100 baits to run a trip on a good day. However, the drum fishery is going down, particularly in the southern region of the state. You need to work with other states. Is it fair to constrain fishermen in NC when you can go to other states and catch all you want. How can it work. When it comes to red drum you need to do research on caged oyster leases. Bottom leases work great. The fish don’t like the caged oysters. Red drum and speckled trout don’t like it due to the noise. You need to put a moratorium on caged oyster leases until a study can be done.

Jake Spruill – Defer to speak later, comments are not related to striped mullet. Left before giving comment.

Andy Wood – deferred to speak later in the meeting, comments are not related to striped mullet. Comments are provided closer to the end of the meeting.

Sheel Patel - Defer to speak later, comments are not related to striped mullet. Left before giving comment.

Joe Romano – Commercial fisherman and owner of Sea View Crab Co. – I back what Glenn said. Putting another derby fishery in place messes up everything; the price, floods the markets, deters buyers, etc. The Saturday and Sunday closure is equitable. The division is not hearing what the fishermen are saying. We need collaborative undertaking to tackle these issues. I believe if we have a problem, which I don't think we do, then why would we allow people to catch fish in cast nets before they are old enough to spawn. Data collection is the problem. The mullet fishermen can't be wrong, there are more fish than ever. This is not just for fun, it is food, substance, it's our heritage, it's our livelihoods. We are on the hills of losing many of our fisheries. If you shut us down on November 16th, you are cutting us out. Mullet don't operate on a calendar. Please support us with a Saturday and Sunday closure.

Bonnie Monleone – Defer to speak later, comments are not related to striped mullet. Left before giving comment.

Vote to Recommend Management Options for MFC Consideration

Smith said while simpler is best, just doing weekend closures only gets us to the number. It's likely that fishermen will continue to catch the same amount no matter what days are cut. Skinner indicated that once the fish make it to the ocean, they are no longer available; therefore, there will be reductions. Smith noted they are not entirely lost as the stop netters would still catch them. Skinner agreed, adding that they had a better shot than the estuarine gill netters. Boyce noted that the 30,000-pound stop net limit should address those concerns. Seigler expressed his concern the stop net limit would result in a large number of discards. The question was asked whether the limit was a daily cap or a season cap. Staff indicated once the limit was met the stop net fishery would close. Staff said you could approach it with payback if needed. Dobbs further noted the fishery rarely catches 30,000 pounds annually. Smith questioned how Marine Patrol would enforce the proposed management measures. Colonel Carter Witten, Larine Patrol noted the flat closures are the easiest to enforce and they currently enforce trip limits for several fisheries. It comes down to how the proclamation is written. Scharf said the challenge was enforcing the 500-pound trip limit. Witten further noted that most fishermen know what they have caught by sight alone. If an officer suspects that someone is over the limit, and they require fishermen to go back to the dock and weight their catch.

Scharf asked if Option 7, the seasonal catch limit, was essentially an annual quota. He noted for flounder the division tracks the landings on a daily basis. Would the division use the same infrastructure? There are always concerns with temporal closures that effort will get reallocated due to changes in fleet behavior. It's hard to know how it plays out until you do it. Typically, most states do not manage with annual catch quotas; however, NOAA commonly uses them. I know DMF tries to anticipate the shifts in effort and build it in, but it's hard to know. Annual catch limits work, because when the quota is met, fishing ends and escapement occurs. Dobbs said we know there will be recoupment if we are leaning towards the target. This is an extremely diverse fishery. People depend on the fishery throughout the year. By putting a catch limit in without other measures, you are going to disproportionately affect the roe fishery. Without having a hard end date, the reduction is shared across the fisheries. With a catch cap you are limited to the 2019 landings. Scharf added that the fishing year could start earlier in the year, say October 1. It could still disproportionately impact another part of the fishery. For example, you may not have a summer fishery. Dobbs noted that staff discussed a roe and non-roe season; however, you could have a period of time with no harvest. The catch cap is when you have exhausted all measures. Using a combination of options would be better for fishermen. Smith expressed the need to have a robust biomass first and need to aim for the high end of the reduction so we don't find ourselves back in the same situation. Scharf asked about the

reductions that were implemented with the other plans. Staff noted that the other plans haven't limited harvest and the 200 recreational limit was more an enforcement issue. Scharf noted that the stock was not in an overfished state at the time. Seigler said the biggest difference between plans was that the target changed since Amendment 1; and that is why reductions are now needed. Staff noted that while the target did change from 30% to 35%, it's the threshold that determines the overfished status and it has not changed. Scharf noted targets can change in an assessment due to fleet behavior. It's not driven by the status of the stock. Staff further noted the target was raised from 30% to 35% due to striped mullet's ecological role as a forage species, a better understanding of their life history, and the desire to create a buffer. It's a more conservative point so it could be more sustainable. We didn't account for it before, but we wanted to address it. Seigler questioned the model, adding if the old model was used, we wouldn't need management. Staff indicated that the peer reviewers identified several changes that could be made to the model to improve it; and they were incorporated in the 2022 model. This model found that the stock was overfished and overfishing was occurring. Scharf added the assessment has been approved for management and this is the best model that we have; however, the data ends in 2019, so anything you are seeing in recent years can't be accounted for. Our role is to provide input on the best options to go with. The challenge is due the complexity of the fishery, due to gears, user groups, seasonality. We try to spread the reductions across users to create fair and equitable reductions. Be aware that simple measures usually lead to one or two user groups taking a big hit.

Smith noted that when you put in monthly trip limits, it seems like you need an annual stopping point once "X" amount is caught. You have no season, you need escapement. Scharf asked about DMF recommendation and the commercial trip limits (Option 5.n.). Dobbs added the 50 lb. trip limit would stop the targeted and still allow incidental catch and allow some users to keep fish. Scharf asked about why the landings differed when the stop net cap was added. Staff indicated that for some years it could be an increase for the stop net fishery as they rarely land 30,000 pounds. We understand the cultural aspect of the fishery to NC. The 30,000-pound cap came from the workshop. Right now, there are only about four participants and it's not an emerging industry. Pam Morris noted she had the same concerns as Seigler with the division's recommendation. Further noting that there are a lot of fish out there right now, and we are only regulating people. Morris said she didn't support trip limits and didn't want to see any further regulations on the stop net fishery.

Sustainable Harvest – Commercial Fishery

Motion by Tom Smith to approve DMF recommendation 5.n., 6.b. and 10 for the commercial fishery.

Skinner noted he didn't agree with the motion as it was too complex. Smith said while he too believes that simpler is better, he merely just wanted to get the discussion going. While he feels a quota or a total allowable catch would be ideal, these options still allow fishing to occur while getting the needed reductions. Skinner disagreed and said he supported option 5.a. Scharf added that weekend closures would achieve the needed reduction if there were no shift in behavior. Seigler added the motion would cut out fishermen in the southern part of the state as the fish don't show up until Thanksgiving. Staff indicated that this would actually extend the season as compared to 2022. It was asked if the division examined different opening dates for north and south, more or less creating two roe mullet seasons. Dobbs indicated that it could be an option and part of the AC recommendation, but staff would need additional time to calculate the reductions. Dobbs noted when it was discussed at the workshop, fishermen were opposed to it. A friendly amendment was offered and accepted to modify the motion to include a north/south season for an equitable reduction using the Highway 58 Bridge at Emerald Isle. Dobbs noted that at the mullet workshop it was calculated and there was only a three-day difference using the landing from the last 5 years. Staff added it was not favored by fishermen. Dobbs noted that the line could be drawn at the 58 Bridge. Scharf called the motion to a vote.

The motion adjusted with the friendly amendment reads: Motion by Tom Smith to approve DMF recommendation 5.n., 6.b. and 10 for the commercial fishery. With staff looking to adjust the roe season north and south for equitable reduction. Seconded by Truby Proctor.

The motion passed 7-3.

Motion by Ken Seigler for Option 5.a. and the requirement of a minimum 1 3/8-inch bar mesh in gill nets from January 1 - March 31.

Seigler said he felt the motion would get an additional 35% reduction. Dobbs noted any reductions from reducing the minimum mesh size could not be quantifiable. We can calculate a reduction based on minimum fish size. Flora noted that since Option 5.a. meets the reduction, there would be no need to calculate this.

The motion failed due to lack of a second.

Motion by Ken Seigler for Option 5.a. and Option 10. Second by Jeremy Skinner.

Scharf asked if we could put forth both motions. Staff indicated yes, but it would be subject to the MFC interpretation. Both motions meet the reductions needed; however, one is more conservative. Seigler agrees there will be some recoupment with Option 5.a. However, it is simpler. The weekend only closure is fair to everyone. Skinner noted that he would agree with option 5.n if there was a problem with the stock. The numbers we are seeing indicate things are getting better, thus more extreme measures are not needed. Smith again, just doing the minimum has not worked and we will never fully realize the reduction if we don't go with the other motion. Skinner and Seigler disagreed. Scharf noted that if the stock is expanding and it supports your notion the division can use adaptive management (Option 10) if the stock rebounds faster than expected. Discussion circled back around to the stop net fishery cap and its contribution. Staff indicated that it made up such a small percentage of the harvest it changed the numbers only slightly. The stop net fishery would not be bound to anything, but the 30,000 cap. Option 10 was added as a friendly amendment to the motion.

Skinner asked if the amendment started in 2023. Staff indicated yes.

Motion fails 3-5 with two abstentions.

Sustainable Harvest – Recreational Fishery

Motion by Sam Boyce for Options 1.b. and 2.b. for the recreational fishery. Second by Jason Fowler.

Staff clarified the for-hire option allows the captain to have the fish on the boat prior to the clients getting on the boat; the limit would still be 50 fish per person. Seigler took issue with the commercial harvest being restricted on the weekends while letting recreational fishermen have 50 fish. Scharf said the recreational sector makes up less than 2% of the harvest. Seigler noted 50 juvenile mullet allowed per day for recreational use is not equitable when the commercial fishermen are limited to 50 pounds a day on the weekend, which equates to only 25 fish allowed commercially on those days.

Ken noted that in roe mullet terms that's 50 juvenile mullet equates out to 50 bait fish, which is not equitable if the commercial fishermen are limited to only 50 pounds on the weekends.

Motion passes 8-0 with two abstentions.

ISSUES FROM AC MEMBERS

Scharf encouraged the AC to provide staff as well as he and Tom Smith with topics to be discussed at future meetings.

Andy Wood, a member of the public who wished to defer comments until later after public comment in the meeting spoke briefly and provided staff with a letter from the Coastal Plain Conservation Group. Andy Wood – I would like to speak about eels, shad, sturgeon, and striped bass. We need holistic management. Beyond the saltwater and freshwater environments, management should look to how land use impacts fisheries. Please consider coastal forest destruction related to the wood pellet industry. It feeds an industry that is in economic crisis. Their whole plan of cutting and sending trees to England to burn is flawed and it would be better if we just exported coal. What’s going on the land impacts the seas. Please see my handout for more details. The handout was saved with meeting materials and available upon request.

Scharf reminded the AC members that the Marine Fisheries Commission Update from 2023 was included in the digital package of materials that was sent out. Staff indicated that paper handouts are no longer mailed to the AC member and can be available at the meetings upon request. Staff noted the division will hold a Flounder Symposium in New Bern at the Riverfront Convention Center on March 20, 2024. The symposium is open to the public and is an opportunity for stakeholders, researchers and DMF staff to discuss research related to Southern Flounder in North Carolina. The details of the flounder symposium can be found on the division’s website.

Jeremy Skinner motioned to adjourn, seconded by Tom Smith. The meeting ended at 8:52 p.m.

February 2, 2024

MEMORANDUM

TO: Marine Fisheries Commission
Finfish Advisory Committee

FROM: Jason Rock, Biologist Supervisor
Lee Paramore, Northern District Manager
Fisheries Management Section

SUBJECT: Meeting of the Marine Fisheries Commission’s Finfish Advisory Committee, Jan. 16, 2024 to provide recommendations for management options for Marine Fisheries Commission Consideration on draft Amendment 2 to the Striped Mullet Fishery Management Plan

The Marine Fisheries Commission’s (MFC) Finfish Advisory Committee (AC) held a meeting on Jan. 16, 2024, at the Division of Marine Fisheries’ Central District Office, Morehead City, North Carolina and via webinar. Advisory Committee members could attend in either setting and communicate with other committee members.

The following Advisory Committee members were in attendance: Tom Roller (online), Mike Blanton (online), Jeff Buckel, Brent Fulcher, Chris Hickman (online), Dave Mense (online), Allyn Powell, Randy Proctor, and Bill Tarplee (Absent – Lewis Dunn, Larry Lord, Scott Whitley).

Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) Staff: Jason Rock, Lee Paramore, Kathy Rawls, Steve Poland, Jeff Dobbs, Willow Patten, Dan Zapf, Brandi Salmon, Corrin Flora, Hope Wade, Justin Lott, Carter Witten, Debbie Manley, Casey Knight, Tina Moore, Lucas Pensinger, Jesse Bisette, and Rick Crawshaw.

Public: Ken Seigler, Glenn Skinner, Joey Frost, Jeremy Skinner, Marvin Newman, Jamie Frost, Romie Salter, Brian Peele, Neal Smith, Alyson Belvin, Jeremy Asdenti, Connor Salter, and David Willis. Thirty-two viewers watched on YouTube.

The Finfish AC had nine members present at the start of the meeting and a quorum was met.

Finfish AC Chair Tom Roller called the meeting to order at 6:08 p.m.

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA AND APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Tom Roller asked the AC members if they approved of moving public comment after the Striped Mullet FMP draft Amendment 2 discussion but before the Finfish AC votes on recommendations.

A motion was made to approve the modified agenda by Brent Fulcher. Second by Randy Proctor. The motion passed without objection.

A motion was made to approve the minutes from the Finfish AC meeting held on Apr. 13, 2023. Motion by Jeff Buckel to approve the minutes. Second by Dave Mense. The motion passed without objection.

STRIPED MULLET FMP DRAFT AMENDMENT 2

Discussion of Draft Amendment 2

Willow Patten noted a full presentation on the management options is available online and today would be a verbal discussion following the Decision Document as part of the digital materials sent to the group and posted online. Patten said today's action item is to provide a recommendation to the MFC for Striped Mullet FMP Amendment 2 to achieve sustainable harvest. A 21.3 to 35.4% reduction in commercial harvest relative to commercial landings in 2019 is needed to rebuild the stock and end overfishing. Management options include season closures, size limit, trip limits, day of week options as well as combinations of various options. The DMF recommendation is for a combination option that includes day of the week trip limits (Option 5.n. – Jan. 1-31 and Nov. 16 – Dec. 31 50 lb., Sat-Sun 50 lb, Feb. 1 – Oct. 15 500 lb.) with a stop net catch cap (Option 6.b. – 30,000 lb. annual catch cap).

Jeff Buckel asked about the division recommending a higher reduction due to low recruitment in recent years and wanted to know if the recruitment is based on the stock assessment or a survey with more recent data. Patten indicated it is from the terminal year of the stock assessment. Brent Fulcher discussed the landings in 2017, 2018, and 2019 and that in two of those three years, red roe landings were higher than the spawning stock biomass (SSB) estimates in the stock assessment. Why is the division pushing for a 35% reduction in harvest when we know there is no way the fishery harvested for three consecutive years more roe mullet than the assessment shows were there. Leniency should be allowed since we know there is something wrong. Models are great but only as good as the data, if the data isn't correct then we come out with the wrong result. It needs to be conveyed by the division that there are some flaws in this. Dobbs acknowledged the magnitude of SSB could be off but the trend is what is important and has been decreasing. The point is not exactly how many fish there are but what is the trend in the data. Fulcher stated the landings from his facility are within 3,500 pounds during the same period last year. Management under the supplement established a derby fishery and he had to turn away fishermen. Would have had the biggest season last year if it didn't close. Note that last year was the biggest year class we have had in this state. Beach crew had their biggest catch last year in one swipe (~76,000 pounds). Management should be on the lower side.

Bill Tarplee was also concerned like Fulcher after going through the data. Understand we need to look at the downward trend but there is a discrepancy between the number of fish being harvested and the stock assessment. We need to look real hard at the stock assessment while making recommendations for reductions. Dobbs indicated we have seen an uptick in Program 915 since the terminal year of the stock assessment but we don't know what that means for the stock condition until we update the stock assessment with data through 2024. We can't change the stock status without updating the stock assessment. Corrin Flora added that the adaptive management in the FMP will allow management to be updated based on the results of an updated stock assessment. Allyn Powell asked for an example of where adaptive management has modified management. Is there any evidence that this works? Flora indicated that the striped bass plan has adaptive management that has been used previously and in Amendment 2 for blue crab, adaptive management was based on the Traffic Light approach but that was changed to a stock assessment in Amendment 3. Powell asked if Program 915 is adequate for estimating the abundance of schooling fishes.

Dobbs responded yes. Powell asked how we estimated recruitment. Dan Zapf indicated it is estimated by the stock assessment based on the available data in the stock assessment.

Roller asked about the intent of reducing the recreational bag limit and how that affects captain and crew. Patten indicated that the captain and crew would be able to possess their limits on a for-hire trip. Roller asked if for-hire trips can possess the bag limit for 6 customers based on a 6-pack license even if they only have one customer? Flora indicated the intent was to allow for-hire guides to possess more than the individual limit prior to having customers onboard since they typically catch bait prior to customers arriving and Marine Patrol needed a way to enforce the limit.

Buckel asked if option 6, stop net catch cap of 30,000 lb., is based on a 35% reduction from the historical average. Dobbs responded it would not be a reduction from the terminal year of the stock assessment and is well above the 5-year average. The FMP AC agreed they wanted to allow the fishery to continue operating and based on discussions this seemed like a reasonable number and limits future expansion of the fishery.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Ken Seigler – commercial fisherman – expressed concern about recommendation 5.n., had concern with a hard closure date in November, that will put 100% of the reduction on the fishermen in the southern part of the state. The FMP says although spawning may occur into March, females re-absorb eggs after November, so it is unlikely those fish will spawn, so what return on investment is there in saving those fish? He asked if we are double counting SSB by adding fish after the closure to SSB then that is a problem, 5.n. should be removed. Options 5.a., 5.d., and 5.f., difference between options is a small percentage, prefers option with a 50 lb allowance during closures to allow harvest for bait that would otherwise have to be thrown away.

Glenn Skinner – Executive Director of the North Carolina Fisheries Association and commercial fisherman – when looking at the last three years of the stock assessment and then looking at what we harvested in those years, we harvested more fish than the stock assessment says was present. The question is how much higher is SSB than what is in the assessment? We are seeing an uptick in commercial landings and DMF survey data. This tells me SSB is much much higher than we think. You can't catch what fishermen have the past few years without a lot of fish in the water. The weekend closure gives you a 25% reduction, there is no reason to shoot for the moon.

Joey Frost – commercial fishermen – he was on striped mullet advisory committee and was asked in a meeting what is bottom line number for stop net fishery. He has to pay fishermen hauling fish, 33% is kept for the operation, and the rest is divided among 21 men. Each person would make \$365 if the catch was limited to 30,000 pounds. He also has to maintain tractors and a boat. He wants to go with the weekend closure option without a cap on the stop net fishery.

Jeremy Skinner – commercial fisherman – on page 89, he recommends option 5.a. with option 10. This will get a 25.7% reduction and should be enough with trends we are seeing in the fishery and knowing it will be reevaluated in a couple years. The biggest issue we have is handling the amount of fish we are catching. Fishermen are using larger mesh sizes because fish were bigger. Need to consider the upward trend we are seeing in the fishery.

Vote to Recommend Management Options for MFC Consideration

Fulcher said a lot of different scenarios have been put together, were specific dates looked at for stop net fishery? Like shortening the open season so it could operate similar to how it has evolved. They never know how many fish are there when they strike the net, my fish house landed 143,000 pounds of mullet

in 2 days, 76,000 pounds of which were theirs (stop net). Fishing practices changed this year and in the north they started fishing before buyers showed up and stored fish that soured and one of the large buyers pulled out of the state. If you can do something when you want you work at your own pace but when someone tells you that you can only go in this window then you go. Once they (stop net) catch those fish they are on the beach and discards will be an eyesore. I feel we already have too many unanswered questions so we can go toward lower end for reductions and see how the stock responds. This past year was not fair to fishermen south of Hwy 58, fishermen migrate with the fish so we have to think of how people operate and incorporate into decision document. Maybe go with 5.a. and figure out something for the stop net fishery. Dobbs noted that due to sporadic nature of the stop net fishery, trying to look at previous years and shifts in the fishery make it difficult to come up with an end date. He also noted that recommendations came from the AC workshop and industry was in favor of that approach but that seems to have changed. We are looking at other measures due to derby effect in fishery last year, and keep in mind the supplement was supposed to be a short-term measure. It sounds like catch cap in stop net fishery won't work but there are other ways to get reductions. Day of the week closures have recoupment issues because of behavior changes, but they can be effective so there is good reason to shoot a little higher. Fulcher stated he wants to get a reduction during roe season to help biomass. What will help us get to 25% with stop net fishery? Dobbs noted that a Saturday-Sunday, including the stop net fishery, will get a higher estimated reduction than if catch cap is implemented. Roller asked the AC if there is anything we don't want to see included or the MFC should not consider, like size limits? Powell suggested looking at options 5.a., 5.c., 5.f., and 5.n.

Sustainable Harvest – Commercial Fishery

Motion by Allyn Powell to only include options 5.a., 5.c., 5.f., and 5.n., without stop net cap. Seconded by Bill Tarplee.

Fulcher offered a friendly amendment that with the uncertainty in the assessment, option 5.a. should be the only one discussed by the committee and no changes recreationally. Chris Hickman said he would be willing to look at a 21.3% reduction and not do more until we figure out what model we are going with. Powell agreed with the friendly amendment. The seconder, Bill Tarplee, did not agree so the original motion remained.

Fulcher made a substitute motion that the Finfish AC recommend option 5.a. with the 25.7% reduction which is more than the 21% reduction by law is used for management without a stop net cap. Seconded by Randy Proctor.

Fulcher stated his rationale for the motion is based on the past two mullet seasons. It is pretty evident the stock is on the rebound and with the uncertainty in stock assessment and fishery, we can't make a decision to take more than what the law requires us to do. The 25.7% reduction is above the 21.3% minimum reduction and gives some buffer. Powell asked if 25% is closer to the target? Staff indicated that it is closer to the threshold. Fulcher stated option 5.a. has the lowest reduction that is presented and if we go picking things on our own they may not meet legal requirements. Dobbs noted that while the biomass estimates from the stock assessment may be questionable, the trend is what is important and the trend has been declining. Buckel stated that with stock assessments, if the biomass level changes then the reference points change too, the trend is what is important. There may be some evidence of an upward trend recently and asked if the uptick in P915 is higher than previous years. Dobbs and Zapf indicated we have seen better numbers recently, 2019 was a low year, 2021 was one of highest values, 2022 was one of the lowest years, and 2023 anecdotally has been higher.

The substitute motion Passed 4-3-2.

New main motion for the Finfish AC is to recommend option 5a with the 25.7% reduction which is more than the 21% reduction by law is used for management without a stop net cap.

The motion Passed 5-2-2.

Dobbs reminded the committee that option 10, adaptive management, still needs to be voted on by the committee. Roller asked if there were any other options to consider for the commercial fishery?

Motion by Brent Fulcher to approve the division recommendation for adaptive management for this fishery. Seconded by Randy Proctor.

The motion Passed 7-0-2.

Sustainable Harvest – Recreational Fishery

Tarplee wanted to know what number of baits a captain would like to have without any regulation? Roller said for me personally I think 50 is a good number, though I would add a lot of captains will go out before their trip to catch bait so not having the exemption would be detrimental. Patten noted that MRIP data shows that most anglers harvest less than 50 mullet per trip.

Motion by Brent Fulcher that for recreational and for hire vessel bag limit stay status quo. Seconded by Chris Hickman.

Proctor stated that recreational sector is insignificant so why do we need to do anything? Patten noted that part of the reason for limiting the recreational sector is to prevent effort shifting from the commercial fishery to the recreational fishery. Dobbs added that 200 seems too high for one person so we want to put some more reasonable guard rails on the fishery. Powell asked what percent the recreational harvest make of the overall fishery. Zapf noted that recreational harvest averages 1-2 percent of the fishery. Fulcher stated that lowering the possession limit is putting more stress on Marine Patrol. Zapf clarified the recreational fishery already has 200 fish limit, status quo option, that MP is enforcing. Buckel asked if there is concern later, can trip limit be changed with adaptive management? Zapf indicated it could be changed with adaptive management. Fulcher said he thinks the biggest species targeted with RCGL is shrimp not mullet. Zapf noted that if bait for purchase is limited then recreational effort may increase to compensate. Buckel asked if an option was endorsed by FMP AC? Zapf said he thought they suggested a 100 fish limit.

The motion passed 6-0-3.

Fulcher said I think you heard discussion here from all aspects/sides, and everyone is very concerned about the data in the assessment being used to make management decisions. We understand the need to protect the resource but don't want to use something with this much uncertainty. Buckel thanked staff for having answers on hand, it was very helpful for the discussion.

Paramore reminded the AC members that the Marine Fisheries Commission Update from 2023 was included in the digital package of materials that was sent out. Paramore noted the division will hold a Flounder Symposium in New Bern at the Riverfront Convention Center on March 20, 2024. The symposium is open to the public and is an opportunity for stakeholders, researchers and DMF staff to discuss research related to Southern Flounder in North Carolina. The details of the flounder symposium can be found on the division's website.

The meeting adjourned at 7:54 pm.



ROY COOPER
Governor

ELIZABETH S. BISER
Secretary

KATHY B. RAWLS
Director

January 30, 2024

MEMORANDUM

TO: Marine Fisheries Commission
Shellfish/Crustacean Advisory Committee

FROM: Anne Deaton, Habitat Program Manager, Habitat and Enhancement Section
Tina Moore, Southern District Manager, Fisheries Management Section

SUBJECT: Meeting of the Marine Fisheries Commission's Shellfish Crustacean Advisory Committee, January 11, 2024. For discussion on items to develop in the Eastern Oyster FMP Amendment 5 and Hard Clam FMP Amendment 3.

The Marine Fisheries Commission's Shellfish/Crustacean Advisory Committee (AC) held an in-person meeting on January 11, 2024, at the Division of Marine Fisheries, Central District Office, Morehead City, NC. There was also a virtual option for those that could not attend in person.

The following AC members were in attendance: Lauren Burch, Jim Hardin, Tim Willis, Michael Hardison, Mike Marshall, and Ted Wilgis. Online: Ryan Bethea, Mike Blanton, Mary Sue Hamann, and Brian Shepard. Absent: Bruce Morris

Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) Staff: Hope Wade, Debbie Manley, Jeff Dobbs, Joe Facendola, Corrin Flora, Tina Moore, Anne Deaton, Carter Witten, Lorena de la Garza, Casey Knight, Charlie Deaton, Steve Poland, Alan Bianchi

Public: There were 13 viewers on YouTube.

Shellfish/Crustacean AC Chair Mike Blanton called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

Chair Blanton provided some introductory remarks and let AC members introduce themselves. The Shellfish/Crustacean AC had a quorum.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

A motion was made by Tim Willis to approve the agenda. Second by Lauren Burch. The motion passed without objection.

A motion was made by Mike Marshall to approve the minutes from the Shellfish Crustacean AC meeting held on April 18, 2023. Second by Tim Willis. The motion passed without objection.

The AC members introduced themselves. This was the first AC meeting for Michael Hardison and Ryan Bethea.

EASTERN OYSTER FMP AMENDMENT 5 AND HARD CLAM FMP AMENDMENT 3

Jeff Dobbs began by informing the AC the goal and objectives for both plans were approved during the November MFC business meeting. Both plans are looking only at the wild harvest through their development. Staff are beginning to develop issue papers to address potential management and would like early input from the committee. One joint issue for the oyster and clam FMP is the need for a recreational shellfish harvest permit. Because there is currently not a requirement for any type of license or permit for recreational shellfish harvest, data is not available to estimate the number of recreational shellfishers. Staff would like to consider requiring a low cost or free permit. This would provide a means to gain understanding of the total number of people participating.

Tim Willis asked if DMF could sample somehow to get an idea of effort, rather than a permit or license. Dobbs explained that the nature of the fishery with people walking in from shore and private docks year-round makes it difficult for creel clerks to encounter fishers to get an estimate. Lauren Burch noted this is probably the last fishery that does not need a permit or license. Joe Facendola explained that it would require legislative action if the change was incorporated into the CRFL license requirements. Facendola noted that initially shellfish was included in CRFL license rules but was taken out at some point. Mike Marshall explained it was partially because it was considered a subsistence fishery - critical food resource for low-income residents. Steve Poland said the staff is considering incorporating the benefits of having a permit in the plan. If the MFC decides it is worth doing and approve including this as a recommendation in the FMP, it will provide more justification for implementation. Mary Sue Hamann questioned if it would require significant reporting on part of the holder. To address this and other committee comments, Dobbs explained that DMF uses surveys to get information on catch from recreational license holders, but since a license is not required, there is no pool of contacts to reach out to. If they did have a license or permit, DMF could survey and subsample to get an estimate on recreational effort and catch. This information is the first step to determine if recreational landings are significant relevant to commercial landings. Brian Shepard noted that there are no strictly recreational clambers. Rather, they tend to casually collect some shellfish while doing other activities on the water. Michael Hardison said that people must get permits for all types of hunting and we need to have a gauge on recreational effort. Marshall agreed and said it is a big missing piece of information and a permit would be the least obtrusive and no cost. Tina Moore said that these comments are for scoping and it seems there is enough interest from the AC to explore. They would also like to know if AC members would support a permit, and if it should be free or with a nominal cost. Blanton reiterated to the AC that their responsibility tonight is to help the division frame the FMP document. Because of the considerable size of our coast and tourism it might be good idea to have permit. Hamann asked staff to report back about how other states handle this. Ted Wilgis added that NCCF gets lots of calls in the summer about clamming. Any outreach should be provided in Spanish as well as English.

Joe Facendola explained that the Oyster Amendment 5, unlike previous plans, would only include wild harvest - shellfish leasing will be addressed separately through the lease program. There are three major issues that will be addressed. Subtidal oyster management using mechanical harvest, mostly in the north; intertidal hand harvest, mostly in south; and recreational harvest which Dobbs just went over and will be in both amendments. For mechanical harvest Facendola explained we currently use trigger sampling, with a 26% legal threshold. Staff is looking at a different way to manage, with rotational harvest of subtidal cultch planting sites. Subtidal oysters in the Pamlico system need to grow higher in the water column to have adequate oxygen at certain times. Mechanical harvest is not good for that because it lowers the reef profile. Staff is considering large cultch planting sites with a fixed season. Lauren Burch asked how mechanical harvest season is managed now. Facendola explained about trigger sampling, and different seasons in bays versus deeper water. The new method would allow mechanical harvest only on a subset of existing large cultch sites that are about 10 acres in deep water. Harvest would be a fixed season and

fishermen could continue harvesting on a cultch site until it was depleted of legal oysters. Then those sites would close for approximately three years until legal-sized oysters had reestablished.

Blanton asked about the number of participants. Facendola said it has been declining, ranging from 30 to 50 participants. The peak was in 2010. Moore said the high effort was due to shellfish license holders at that time being able to mechanical harvest which can no longer occur due to legislative changes no longer allowing this license for mechanical methods. Marshall added that in the 1990s it was a boom-and-bust fishery, and Dermo was a contributing factor. Late 1990s hardly any mechanical harvest and then in oysters started expanding again in the deep water and like said everyone pulled their gear out to harvest. Blanton thought oyster harvesters in the northern waters was declining in deep water due to the uncertainty of the season openings and closings. He would like that changed for mechanical harvesters. Other states manage through rotational harvesting and it is pretty successful and think it's possible for NC. Brian Shepard noted that some of the shellfish decline is due to increasing wastewater treatment plant discharges into rivers. This creates a dead layer. Maryland buys spat on shell and putting a huge amount out. NC doesn't do that – put rock out and sometimes it works well, sometimes not. Marshall Mentioned that the 26% trigger was an attempt to get more data, before we used number of violations and when trips came into the dealer. He supports trying different things. We need to protect the habitat and other factors. Tim Willis mentioned that in Chesapeake Bay and Louisiana they were dredging in dead zones to mix it up. Facendola added there are two issues – sediment and oxygen. Trying to lift shell up out of sediment for spat. Probably more sediment issue in bays since closer to runoff. He said that current management in the bays is working, but not in the deeper sound. Storm events reduce oxygen in the deeper areas and they die off on the bottom but stay alive higher up in the water column. With this strategy, oyster sanctuaries would continue to grow taller to allow survival and increase reproductive potential, and increased cultch around the sanctuaries would provide more recruitment area. Provide more spat to resettle on the sites to re-populate the deep water areas,

We'll need to do this in baby steps over the next few decades. Facendola said ultimately, we would want a stock assessment to identify what is available for harvest. In 10-20 years, a stock assessment might be feasible. Burch asked if you just want to go to season. For this paper the strategy would start with a subset of managed areas. Staff is looking at the trigger data to determine some correlations, such as when a certain percentage of oysters are legal-size, the season can open a specific number of weeks. Some certainty for fishermen on the duration of the season. A lot of effort to gear up for this fishery and they know how long to fish. Then harvest at rotational sites could occur after the set season for example, 8 weeks. The larger cultch planting sites will have 16 sites built this year and could potentially have 4 cultch areas open a year. Ted Wilgis supports looking at different strategies. He suggested that in the plan try to provide estimates on how much material you need to maintain adequate cultch planting areas, where they could be located, and enforcement. If you have records on monetary effort in management, the state can qualify for hurricane assistance funds for oyster planting. Hamann asked if runoff can be addressed. Anne Deaton replied that this is addressed in the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan (CHPP). A large focus of the most recent amendment (DEQ 2021) was addressing water quality.

Shepard thought a set season is a good idea for this fishery. Wilgis asked what tools can be used to adjust the season? Facendola said that changes could be made if necessary, through adaptive management and proclamations. Blanton asked how we can do this successfully if the 26% trigger now is not working for the the number of participants now if we don't know what is sustainable. Facendola said you can look at current bushel limits, how long it takes based on effort now, they are capped in rule at 25 bushels. Can look at changing the bushel limit. Corrin Flora noted that this plan takes effort off the natural reefs, which will enhance natural reefs with no pressure on them. Marshall mentioned for clarification that the 26% trigger was designed by a UNC study as habitat protection measure, to retain enough cultch in the water. The trigger was not a fishery management measure it was a habitat protection measure.

Discussion moved on to intertidal oysters. The fishery is by hand harvest, primarily in the southern coast, and accounts for the majority of landings. The landings have been stable. There currently is no sampling in this area. The only indicator used to gauge the fishery was whether a trip landed less than 5 bushels. The previous FMP reduced the commercial shellfish license holder limits from 5 to 2 bushels. We have seen the number of participants drop since that change in bushel limits. And we'll look into any changes in the participants and trips further in this plan. The previous plan also called for development of an intertidal sampling plan. Facendola explained it is under development by staff in Habitat and Enhancement and Fisheries Management sections. Wilgis asked if the sampling is tied to shellfish mapping and includes open and closed harvest areas and could provide information to aid cultch planting. Anne Deaton said yes, sampling would occur in mapped sentinel sites in closed and open areas. We also are trying a pilot study using drones to look at oyster reef height. Wilgis asked is you could use for cultch planting sites to identify areas needing more material? Facendola, yes that could be used just trying to build the infrastructure with material holding sites as well as people and equipment. Brian Shepard asked if the FMP could look at whether too many shellfish leases could negatively impact wild populations. Too many triploid oysters taking the resources from the wild stock. Wilgis said there are studies that show carrying capacity showing impacts to wild stocks, more of a research question. Willis noted there are studies ongoing in the South Atlantic or possibly the Gulf States. Staff said it could be included as a research question or passed on to the leasing program. Willis asked if there was any understanding between the natural bottom leases versus caged ones. Facendola said that is not my area of expertise. Flora said we could send those questions to the shellfish lease program.

Jeff Dobbs reviewed the major issues to be discussed in the clam FMP - mechanical clam harvest. There has been a decline in effort over the years, with only 4 participants in 2021. That, in addition to habitat concerns, have resulted in closing of some areas to mechanical clamming. Due to encroachment from oysters and seagrass in these mechanical areas. We close the area in Bogue Sound completely due to seagrass and modified other areas. He asked for input on: 1) ending the mechanical clam fishery; and 2) ending the opening of channels prior to navigational dredging. The latter has not been done since 2007. The dredging is problematic due to timing with working with the ACOE and timing when fishermen notifies DMF to open the area before the maintenance dredging activity occurs.

If the mechanical harvest season is removed, they would likely end the other as well. Dobbs noted that the negatives of the fishery are the effort to mark and enforce for low participation, and potential habitat impacts from turbidity and SAV. Willis asked why would we limit fishing activity of the gear when it is only four people now. If so few people why the issue? Dobbs said it was of historically important and of value to more fishers. Dobbs said DMF is responsible for marking the areas, it takes a lot of staff time and resources to mark, and enforce. Also, habitat concerns with dredging up the bottom and turbidity and uprooting seagrass. Willis reiterated it is not many people and so why consider. Flora noted the paper will address the fishery and number of participants. Willis said let the fishermen put out the signs then.

Hardison asked if the four remaining fishermen are increasing landings. Dobbs explained that the active participants are in New River and there is variability in landings as it is opened every other year. Because DMF rotates open areas, numbers are higher when New River is open, and lower when its closed. Shepard said although it is only a few participants it is important to them. He also mentioned that New River has had several clam die offs in deep water. He said stirring up the bottom and removing sediment is helpful, and since we've reduced trawling and clam dredging up there, conditions are worse. He added that for the participants that rely on this fishery, it is important. If we don't have activity up there the bottom will die and Hurricane Florence caused some die off as well.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

ISSUES FROM AC MEMBERS

A Flounder Symposium will be held at the New Bern Convention Center on March 20, 2024. Details will be on the DMF website soon. No issues were brought forward by other members.

PLAN AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

Moore said they don't have ideas from staff yet due to MFC upcoming in February and the MFC Liaison position is vacant. She noted the MFC Habitat and Water Quality AC is meeting next week to discuss an issue through the Shrimp FMP Amendment 2 to look at the open/closed areas to shrimp trawling and overlaps with seagrass presence. This paper will go to the MFC in February and may come back to other MFC ACs, dependent on the discussion with the MFC. No additional items were requested.

Tim Willis made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Lauren Burch. The meeting adjourned at 7:46 p.m.

DRAFT

Jan. 23, 2024

MEMORANDUM

TO: Marine Fisheries Commission
Habitat and Water Quality Advisory Committee

FROM: Anne Deaton, Habitat Program Manager, Habitat and Enhancement Section
Jimmy Harrison, Fisheries Resource Specialist, Habitat and Enhancement Section

SUBJECT: Meeting of the Marine Fisheries Commission’s Habitat and Water Quality Advisory Committee,
Jan. 17, 2024

The Marine Fisheries Commission’s (MFC) Habitat and Water Quality Advisory Committee (AC) held an in-person meeting on Jan. 17, 2024, at the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF), Central District Office, Morehead City, NC. There was also a virtual option for those who could not attend in person.

The following AC members were in attendance: Doug Rader, Sarah Gardner, Nathan Hall, Scott Leahy, Lisa Rider, Joel Fodrie, Mark Parrish, Jack (Bart) Durham

Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) Staff: Hope Wade, Debbie Manley, Corrin Flora, Anne Deaton, Jason Parker, Jimmy Harrison, Steve Poland, Dan Zapf, Casey Knight, Kathy Rawls, Tina Moore, Jason Rock, Carter Witten

Public: Glenn Skinner, Brent Fulcher, Brian Horsley, Larry Kellum, Sr., Kenny Rustick, Larry Kellum, Jr., Mike Styron, Bradley Styron, Zack Davis, Thomas Smith, Harry Mizelle, Allen Smith, Cayton Daniel. Thirteen in attendance, six of which gave comments, and 30 viewers on You Tube.

Habitat and Water Quality Chair Doug Rader called the meeting to order at 5:59 p.m.

The chair invited members to introduce themselves and a quorum was met.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA AND APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Doug Rader recommended that the public comment period be moved to occur immediately following the presentation by DMF staff. **Scott Leahy made a motion to approve the agenda as amended. The motion was seconded by Nathan Hall. The motion passed without objection.**

A motion was made by Nathan Hall to approve the minutes from the Habitat and Water Quality AC meeting held on April 19, 2023. Bart Durham requested that the minutes be sent to him, as he

had not seen them prior to the meeting. Doug Rader recommended that the motion be tabled until later in the meeting and Anne Deaton emailed them to Durham.

PROTECTION OF CRITICAL SEAGRASS HABITAT THROUGH SHRIMP TRAWL AREA CLOSURES PRESENTATION

This issue paper was developed because the 2022 Shrimp Fishery Management Plan Amendment 2 included a management strategy to use adaptive management to further protect submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) habitat in North Carolina. The MFC motion required that staff draft the issue paper in collaboration with CHPP staff and input from the Habitat and Water Quality AC and stakeholders.

Chris Stewart gave a presentation on the issue paper and management options. Stewart reviewed the ecosystem functions provided by SAV, its benefit to NC's economy, and the negative impacts that bottom disturbing gear can cause to SAV. Trawling has been documented to shear, cut, or bury SAV leaves, flowers, or seeds, increase turbidity and sedimentation, disrupt ecosystem food webs, and reduce habitat complexity. The issue paper looked at areas where areas open to trawling overlapped with documented SAV habitat. Stewart reviewed the management options for each region. In Regions 1 and 9, it was determined that no further management was needed. Management options in Region 2 included prohibiting trawling on a portion of the western edge of Roanoke Island from Weir Point to the Manns Harbor Bridge, and limiting trawling to the main channel (100 ft to either side of the Roanoke Channel). For Region 3, the management option included prohibiting trawling year-round in designated pot areas of the Pamlico, Bay, and Neuse Rivers. For Region 4, the option included creating and expanding closures along a portion of the western shoreline of Dare and Hyde counties. For Region 5, the options included limiting trawling to the main channel plus 100 ft to either side, prohibiting trawling along a portion of the western shoreline of Roanoke Island, and modifying the existing trawl net prohibited area to include portions of the western shoreline behind Salvo and Buxton Harbor. The option for Region 6 included prohibiting trawling in Core Sound and its tributaries, except in the Mechanical Clam Harvest Area (MCHA). Options for Region 7 included prohibiting trawling in the Straits, Back Sound, and their tributaries, modifying or creating shrimp trawl closure lines in the North and Newport rivers, and limiting shrimp trawling to the Intracoastal Waterway from Cedar Point to Sanders Island. The option for Region 8 included modifying or creating new shrimp trawl closure lines in the New River. Interactive maps of these areas are available at:

<https://ncdenr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=61f2b88f26f7416caba3000163231ce1>

The DMF recommended implementation of all 12 management options in support of the CHPP goal of protecting and restoring SAV, and that modified closure lines include a buffer to protect SAV habitat from physical disturbance, turbidity increases, and sedimentation. Stewart explained that the next step is to present the issue paper and Habitat and Water Quality Advisory Committee (HWQ AC) recommendation(s) to the MFC at its February 2024 business meeting. If new management measures are selected, the proposed closures will be implemented via proclamation authority of the DMF Director in 2024 in accordance with Shrimp FMP Amendment 2. Monitoring of SAV will be conducted by the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership (APNEP) SAV Team during the spring and fall of each year on a rotating waterbody region schedule to evaluate SAV health and abundance.

Rader asked Stewart to clarify that this effort is part of the adaptive management process as approved by the MFC for the Shrimp FMP. Stewart responded yes. Flora noted the process for adaptive management decision-making involves the Commission requesting AC review and for stakeholder input, especially for those who may be impacted. The MFC could ask for additional AC input at the February MFC meeting. If so, the issue would be on the specified AC April agendas, and then go back to the MFC at their May meeting to make a final decision.

Rader noted that this issue paper is not saying that shrimp trawling was the sole threat of impacts to SAV. Other parallel efforts are underway to develop new Environmental Management Commission (EMC) water quality standards through consultation with the CHPP Steering Committee. The water clarity standard was specifically designed based on the sensitivity of seagrass and seagrass habitat to those non-trawling effects. Rader then asked Deaton about the timeframe. Deaton's response was it's at the NC Division of Water Resources (DWR) staff level now and they're hoping to present it to the EMC at the end of 2024.

Rader asked if the focus is not only protecting today's SAV footprint but what was previously present and documented since its distribution varies over time and can expand. Stewart responded that what was shown on the maps was representation of the full extent of mapped SAV over time, from 1981 to 2021. Rader noted that the location of habitat has to do with water clarity, sediments, and light penetration. Deaton noted that wave energy is another factor. Deaton also noted the MFC rulebook has a definition for SAV that includes bare spaces between the vegetation and areas with past documentation of SAV presence. Rader noted water clarity cascades into NC rules under all three Commissions pertaining to coastal development, water quality, runoff, and even to outside of NC where South Atlantic Fishery Management Council has designated SAV in NC as Essential Fish Habitat (EFH)- Habitat Area of Particular Concern (HAPC).

Rader asked if the AC members had questions for DMF staff. Lisa Rider asked for clarification on process differences in how the closure lines in the Newport and North rivers were determined. Stewart responded that in the Newport River, the trawling closure boundaries were limited to where SAV was concentrated in shallow waters bordering the eastern shoreline and lower portion of the river. In the North River, trawling boundaries were limited to the MCHA to protect SAV along the shoreline and surrounding area.

Hall asked why all of South River, Turnagain Bay, and West Bay were closed at the mouth since the centers are pretty deep. Stewart responded that SAV could be found in the shallow water of the water bodies, and that without a defined channel it was easier to set the boundary at the mouth of the creeks to create a buffer.

Leahy asked if these areas are being closed to restore SAV or protect what is currently present. Since it's unclear when SAV may have been lost in certain areas, are we trying to address decades old damage? Deaton responded that the GIS layer is displaying the maximum extent of SAV from all mapping events that have occurred since 1981. There are individual layers for the different mapping events that have been compiled because all areas are usually not mapped in the same year. Leahy asked if the proposed closures would guarantee SAV would regrow out to those lines. Deaton responded these measures would address one of the stressors on SAV and noted there are efforts underway to address other stressors as well. Rader noted a SAV restoration goal (acreage) was absent in the Fisheries Reform Act and is needed to determine success. He further noted that an investment in monitoring to track habitat trends is needed to understand whether management actions were successful. There shouldn't be any unnecessary negative impacts on users, which includes shrimp trawlers.

Durham asked if there was any measurable data to show closures are working? Deaton responded that the large No Trawl Area closure behind the Outer Banks was done as a preventative measure. The closure was put in place when there was less development and when the grass was in good condition. The SAV is still present, but we don't have specific enough monitoring data to say if areas where SAV had been lost due to trawling had revegetated.

Rader noted we need to be able to parse out how different management measures impact SAV and he's in favor of putting these in place to ensure accountability. Hall noted that the earliest mapping data is from 1981, although there's evidence of SAV locations throughout history in geological records for low salinity areas.

Fodrie noted that he appreciates DMF addressing the Straits Channel area, and that Option 2 leaves a narrow channel. Fodrie requested an explanation of the logic of the decision. Stewart noted that in Region 2 (Roanoke Sound, Option 2), the main channel only closure was shortened to create a broad buffer between SAV habitat and the main channel behind the Roanoke marshes.

Similarly, it was difficult to establish a buffer between the main channel adjacent to the Straits; thus, staff chose to create a broad buffer that increased connectivity with the proposed Core Sound closure and the existing Bogue Sound closure established in Amendment 2 and Crab Spawning Sanctuary closures in the Blue Crab FMP Amendment 3.

Rader said if insufficient marking is causing more SAV damage, perhaps they could mitigate the closure with improved marking. Stewart responded that Marine Patrol prefers straight-line closures that use channel markers and existing landmarks; Marine Patrol would like to avoid putting out additional signage in the water due to the cost. Stewart further noted that there is limited effort throughout much of this area; however, these closures would likely impact small trawlers and recreational gear license holders.

Rader asked if there were any other questions from AC members. With no response, Rader moved to the public comment period.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Multiple members of the public signed up to provide comment and were given two minutes each to address the AC. The comments were from individuals involved in the shrimp trawl industry in North Carolina, and most were concerned with how the proposed closures would affect their livelihoods.

Glen Skinner asked if the closures would be year-round. He also questioned if there is a "variable condition" as required when proclamation authority is used. Staff mentioned FMP compliance and ability to modify if monitoring detects SAV changes.

Brent Fulcher said that trawling can actually reduce sedimentation, and the boats used are small with low impact. He mentioned a thesis that suggested that shrimp trawling was not negatively impacting the SAV. Stewart responded that the Division reviewed the thesis and found it to be inconclusive for several reasons as noted in Amendment 1 to the Shrimp FMP.

Kenny Rustick was concerned about closing the Straits, Jarrett and Nelson bays, around Harker's Island, North River, South River, and Turnagain Bay. He said it will harm the small boats. He uses PVC on his chain to reduce SAV damage when working over grass, so it rolls over it. If these areas were to re-open in 10 years the shrimpers would be gone.

Bradley Styron said nor'easters cause more damage to SAV than shrimp trawlers. He also mentioned a shellfish lease where all the oysters died due to silt, but ones on the surface survived, indicating silt is the problem. He said when you close these places, they don't come back.

Zack Davis was concerned about the large acreage that would be closed that doesn't have SAV, particularly South River. While there is SAV along the sides, it's too deep in the middle to sustain grass.

He provided maps from the 2021 draft Amendment 2 of the Shrimp FMP of what he thought should close.

Thomas Smith operates a 50 ft trawler out of Beaufort and owns Miss Judy's Seafood, if this passes it will put us out of business. While I can work the Pamlico Sound, I work many of the tributaries that are proposed to be closed. I would like to see the scallops as well as some of the other fisheries come back but we don't need to put people out of business while trying to do it. Stewart asked how much total headrope he used. Smith said he can pull up to four nets but pulls two 45 ft nets when working these areas to meet the 90 ft requirement. Depending on the year, I work Core Sound as well as many of the other places, this will put me out of business.

Larry Kellum and Larry Kellum Jr. emailed comments to DMF following the meeting. They were concerned that there was lack of understanding on the habitat changes and that no explanation was offered on how the grass beds have survived decades of heavy shrimp trawling activity in open areas. They disagreed with closing the Straits and thought the public should get more than two minutes to speak.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE DISCUSSION ON ISSUE PAPER

Leahy noted that the AC's recommendation should include measurable goals to show that closures through adaptive management measures are successful. Rader noted that if an AC member wants to make a motion to put something on the table and is seconded for discussion, that's fine. Rader supported eliminating direct trawling damage from existing SAV beds and those areas likely to become SAV beds in the future, but unsure of how far away disturbing activities need to be. The job tonight is to recommend what the Commission and director ought to do to protect SAV as a critical habitat, and focus should be on that question.

Hall asked about the South River closure again because it is a deep waterbody. Stewart responded that there's a designated pot area in South River and that area is closed from June 1 to November 30 to trawls. Another option would be to extend the designated pot area closure to a year-round closure. Flora noted that another option is a distance from shore. Stewart responded that Marine Patrol has said that distance from shore is somewhat difficult to enforce. Rader recommended that the AC leave the line determination up to the MFC but move forward with a recommendation to protect SAV habitat. Rader raised the concern of enforceability of closures because they're not marked on the water. In response to a question about the Straits, Stewart mentioned that in Straits Channel, channel netting and shrimp pounds would continue to be allowed; however, it takes the right tide and spot to be fished efficiently.

Rader noted one way forward would be to endorse staff's lines as presented but with the recommendation to protect 100% of known and likely to develop habitats to address fishing and non-fishing impacts. It should be recognized that there are places where seagrass isn't likely to develop, and the necessary adjustments and compromises should be pursued but leave the specifics regarding narrowing the closure to the MFC. Rader did not support re-drawing lines that night. Hall thought that what was presented was fair considering the attention to enforcement and compliance and the difficulties in enforcing. Rader noted that based on what he heard, the intent of the committee was to protect all existing and prospective sea grass habitat from fishing and non-fishing threats and that we would endorse the proper actions to make it happen throughout the lines proposed by staff except in places shown not to be practical as sea grass habitat.

Rider added that their motion should include considerations for the stakeholder groups, including the shrimp industry and small vessel fishers impacted by potential decisions, and Hall agreed. Rader responded that there's currently no motion on the floor. He suggested that a motion include three parts: 1) protect existing and prospective seagrass habitat; 2) endorse (generally) the proposal made by staff with

the provision the lines not include areas that will never have seagrass habitat; and 3) a commitment be made by division and partners and through the CHPP process to continue quantifying the status of seagrass in NC and track the performance of this and other measures meant to protect/restore habitat. Deaton noted that APNEP has a document that details and quantifies mapping changes. Rader noted that he's asking for more than that- a program that actively monitors through time the progress made given management changes. Hall noted that APNEP's efforts are currently more focused on high salinity SAV and not on low salinity areas. A lot of shrimping occurs in these areas. Rader noted that the water quality standard development that's underway is partitioning those things that relate to SAV survival in different settings. He also noted that we shouldn't take today's salinity patterns as what will be there in the future, particularly following storm events.

During motion discussion, Stewart asked if language could be added recommending the use of buffers to protect SAV from sedimentation. Rader noted that a lot of great things have been done regarding buffers but you have to examine the social and economic tradeoffs (community impact) for them to be effective. Deaton asked Rader to clarify his second point. Rader noted in areas greater than six feet deep that it would be expectable to exempt these areas from closures if there is not a likelihood that SAV could be supported.

Rader recommended staff work with stakeholders to develop a practical way to address this before the MFC meeting. Rader noted that if there's an overreach, the Commission needs to be aware.

Leahy noted that budget and cost of enforcement are not included and that the fees collected from license sales should be covering some of those costs.

Rider and Gardner noted that it would help to define the criteria for closures, such as water depth, and clarity, and to be realistic when determining where SAV could come back because blanket closures will shut down people's livelihoods, which isn't the intent. Several noted that there are multiple examples of areas losing seagrass that aren't being fished by shrimpers. Rader agreed that this is important to protect the resources without undue hardship.

Leahy asked if there was a way to roll out the closures other than immediate closures. Rader agreed that a long-term plan would be a good idea and recommended the development of an SAV conservation plan that would track goals consistent with the coastal system. Deaton noted that the existing CHPP SAV issue paper was centered on SAV protection and restoration. Rader responded that he'd like to have more specific goals and Deaton responded that there is an overall goal of protecting and restoring to increase SAV extent to the maximum documented extent (~191,000 acres). We are currently below that acreage goal. Rader responded that prospective distribution is difficult because we don't know where the Outer Banks will be in the future and how that will impact SAV distribution by affecting environmental conditions.

Rader recommended that the AC endorse the development of a SAV Conservation Plan, built upon the CHPP and other plans, that creates goals and a tracking mechanism, beginning with the areas where SAV is most likely to survive. He also noted that there should be a mechanism to revisit the closure zones if SAV isn't returning because there's other stressors causing impacts. Deaton noted the assessment should allow sufficient recovery time. Parrish noted that trawling has been closed in some areas for extended periods, but they're not seeing the SAV recovery which is causing issue with supporting the recommended actions. It seems that SAV extent is getting worse. The closures could cause significant negative impacts on users that may not be the primary stressor. Agricultural and other sources of runoff is a greater threat that isn't being addressed by the MFC. Deaton responded that those are being addressed through the CHPP and water quality standards.

Rader said he hoped to have stakeholder engagement to address their concerns before the MFC meeting, particularly in areas where closures are unnecessarily expansive. Hall noted that he's concerned with the areas that cannot provide SAV habitat and the impact of the closures in those areas on the stakeholders. Flora asked if there was enough time to engage with stakeholders before the next MFC meeting, and the director indicated there was not. Stewart noted that staff can recommend to the MFC in February to send the issue paper out to additional AC groups to get more stakeholder input. Flora responded that this would need MFC approval.

Hall noted that the resource agencies should determine which areas aren't likely to support SAV then go to the stakeholders for collaboration. After further discussion, **Hall made a motion that the AC endorsed the division recommendations to protect existing and prospective SAV habitat. In portions of proposed closure areas where SAV cannot be supported, the division should work with stakeholders to maximize SAV protection while reducing impact on stakeholder use. A commitment should be made to quantify the status of SAV habitat in NC and a monitoring program to measure progress of these programs. Second by Leahy. Motion passed without dissent.**

OTHER ISSUES FROM AC MEMBERS

The motion by Hall to pass the minutes of the April 2023 business meeting was revisited and was seconded by Bart Durham. The motion passed without dissent.

Rader asked if there were other issues to discuss or to put on a list for the future. Leahy asked if there were any efforts to restore SAV through transplanting or seeding and suggested that the AC look into this as a possible solution. Deaton indicated that the Jarvis lab at UNCW is currently working on SAV seed banks. Fodrie messaged Deaton that UNC-IMS received grant funding to try seed restoration.

Rader would like the AC to have an opportunity to review the Oyster and Hard Clam FMP early in the review process and identify priorities for conservation. Deaton responded that the for both [Oyster](#) and [Hard Clam](#) FMP is in the scoping stage and input could at some point. Flora agreed and noted that there's still an online public questionnaire available. Rader asked that it be taken under advisement and bring back a recommendation. Rader noted that non-fishing impacts are likely dominant, and therefore the relief can be found outside of regulatory actions of the MFC. His opinion was that the AC should be able to make recommendations outside of that regulatory process, such as through the CHPP. Flora recommended that it be put on the agenda for the next meeting.

Rider commented that Coastal Carolina Riverwatch (CCRW) is working on a few research projects in the next three years studying oysters (wild and farm-raised populations) relative to potential water quality concerns brought up by the industry. For the upcoming oyster and clam FMP, she would like a heads up on data regarding this and a presentation if possible. Flora noted that the current amendment for oysters and clams will only be wild oysters and won't include farm-raised oysters in that amendment due to DMF's Habitat and Enhancement program covering that purview now.

Rader adjourned the meeting at 8:19 p.m.

February 2, 2024

MEMORANDUM

TO: N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission

FROM: William Brantley, Grants Program Manager, Administrative and Maintenance Services Section

SUBJECT: November 7, 2023, Commercial Fishing Resource Fund Committee Meeting

Issue

The N.C. Commercial Fishing Resource Funding Committee met jointly with the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Commercial Resource Fund Committee at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, November 7, 2023, through Webex to hear a budget report and discuss a draft request for proposals (RFP).

Findings

The joint committees moved through consensus to make minor edits to the draft RFP. Once the RFP is published at a later date, the joint committees will review proposals at an in-person meeting at the DEQ Washington Regional Office.

Action Needed

For informational purposes only, **no action is needed at this time.**

Attachments

- 1) Draft meeting minutes from the November 7, 2023 joint meeting

MEMORANDUM

TO: N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Commercial Resource Fund Committee and the Funding Committee for the N.C. Commercial Fishing Resource Fund

FROM: William Brantley, Grants Program Manager
Division of Marine Fisheries, NCDEQ

DATE: February 1, 2023

SUBJECT: MFC Commercial Resource Fund Committee and Funding Committee for the N.C. Commercial Fishing Resource Fund Meeting Minutes

The MFC Commercial Resource Fund Committee and the Funding Committee for the N.C. Commercial Fishing Resource Fund met at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, November 7, 2023, through Webex. The following members attended:

MFC Commercial Resource Fund Committee: Mike Blanton, Ryan Bethea

Funding Committee for the N.C. Commercial Fishing Resource Fund Members: Chairman Ernest Doshier, Doug Todd, Glenn Skinner, Britton Shackelford, and Gilbert Baccus.

Absent: Sammy Corbett, Steve Weeks

Public Comment: Public comment was sent to committee members.

Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Chairmen Ernest Doshier and Mike Blanton called the meeting to order for the Funding Committee for the N.C. Commercial Fishing Resource Fund and the MFC Commercial Resource Fund Committee. William Brantley read the conflict-of-interest reminder, and no conflicts were noted. Brantley conducted a roll call for both committees.

The meeting agenda and minutes were reviewed.

Motion by Glenn Skinner to approve the agenda. Second by Doug Todd. Motion passed through a roll call vote of present members.

Motion by Ryan Bethea to approve the agenda. Second by Mike Blanton. Motion passed through a roll call vote of present members.

Motion by Doug Todd to approve the minutes from the March 1, 2023 meeting. Second by Glenn Skinner. Motion passed through a roll call vote of present members.

Motion by Ryan Bethea approve the minutes from the March 1, 2023 meeting. Second by Mike Blanton. Motion passed through a roll call vote of present members.

Brantley briefed the committees on the scope of the meeting, which was to hear an update on the balance in the Fund, and to further discuss an upcoming Request for Proposals.

Financial Report

Brantley briefed the Committees that the fiscal year 2023 transfer into the Commercial Fishing Resource Fund was \$617,671. After obligations for on-going projects from the Fund, this leaves \$1,483,078.16 available for the Committees to spend on projects allowed for in NCGS 113-173.1.

Incidental Take Permit Discussion

Chairman Doshier asked for an update on the ITP. Brantley said that the draft Environmental Assessment was on NOAA's webpage if anyone wanted to read it. Additionally, under NCGS 113-173.1, if costs rise to cover additional requirements of the forthcoming ITP, then it could result in a reduction in the amount of funds available to the Commercial Fishing Resource Fund. Skinner asked if law enforcement positions were being added to the ITP. Deputy Director Loeffler stated that investigator positions would be added to help enforce the observer call-in system.

CFRF REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP) DISCUSSION

A draft Request for Proposals was provided for the committees to review.

- Red Drum Characterization Study: At the last meeting, members inquired if the DMF was interested in conducting the red drum characterization study. Brantley noted that division staff had discussed the request and were not able to conduct their study at this time.
- Consumer Education Project: Skinner noted that it would be good to have presentations on prior project metrics before entertaining proposals on the new RFP.
- Blue Crab Study: Blanton inquired about the verbiage on the blue crab request, and wanted to make sure that the contracting of local crab fishermen could be included in the design methodology.
- Water Quality Project: Members discussed the requirement or preference of matching funds by applicants and putting funding caps on the project requests. The consensus was to note a high preference that applicants provide and show matching funds in their proposals, and that water quality proposals would be capped at \$100,000 per year.

- Shrimp Trawl Fishery Project: Brantley said DMF had reviewed this request among division staff, and if this project remains in the RFP, that applicants should be informed that permits for trawling in any closed area would have to be discussed on a case-by-case basis and are not guaranteed.

Brantley said he would incorporate the edits and send to members before publishing the RFP.

Other Topics

Brantley asked for input on how members wanted to hear the updated public relations polling results. A listening station, committee meeting, or sub-committee assignment could be used to hear the firm's results. Skinner stated that he preferred a listening station, and members could hear the results before moving forward with additional public relations projects. Chairmen Doshier and Blanton agreed, noting the information is pertinent to understanding the next steps.

Brantley asked about a preference for the next meeting. Members requested an in-person meeting to review proposals at the Washington Regional Office.

Issues from Committee Members

Chairman Doshier thanked former members Doug Cross and Ana Shellem for their time served on the committees.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Doug Todd to adjourn. Second by Glenn Skinner. Motion passed through a roll call vote of present members.

Motion by Ryan Bethea to adjourn. Second by Mike Blanton. Motion passed through a roll call vote of present members.

Meeting adjourned.

WB