

STATE OF MISSISSIPPI

MISSISSIPPI ADVISORY COMMISSION ON MARINE RESOURCES
COMMISSION MEETING

Tuesday, September 19, 2023, 9:00 a.m.

Bolton Building Auditorium
1141 Bayview Avenue, Biloxi, Mississippi 39530

COMMISSION MEMBERS:Ronnie Daniels
Jonathan McLendon
Jason Osborne
Cammack "Cam" Roberds**ALSO PRESENT:**Joe Spraggins, Director
Sandy Chesnut, Esquire
Steven Eckert, Esquire**REPORTED BY:**Melissa Burdine-Rodolfich
mburdine@sbmreporting.com

1 RONNIE DANIELS:

2 Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and
3 thank you for attending the September 19th
4 Mississippi Advisory Commission meeting. At this
5 time, we'll call the meeting to order.

6 I'd like to ask Cam to lead us in the
7 pledge of allegiance.

8 (Pledge of allegiance was recited.)

9 RONNIE DANIELS:

10 Thank you, Cam.

11 Mr. Joe, you want to lead us in a prayer
12 this morning?

13 JOE SPRAGGINS:

14 Yes. And first off, you know, before we
15 start, there have been some things that's happened
16 over the country in the last few -- month or so,
17 and a lot of storms have come through in
18 Louisiana -- excuse me, Florida and up in the
19 northeast. And we want to remember those people.
20 We want to remember every one of them, you know,
21 in our prayer. I know that they're going through
22 a lot.

23 Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

24 (Moment of prayer.)

25 RONNIE DANIELS:

1 Thank you, Joe.

2 August 15th, 2023 minutes, do we have
3 any discussion on those minutes?

4 (No response.)

5 RONNIE DANIELS:

6 Do we have a motion to approve the
7 minutes?

8 CAM ROBERDS:

9 I'll make a motion to approve the
10 minutes.

11 RONNIE DANIELS:

12 I'll second.

13 All in favor?

14 JONATHAN McLENDON:

15 Aye.

16 JASON OSBORNE:

17 Aye.

18 CAM ROBERDS:

19 Aye.

20 RONNIE DANIELS:

21 All right. Do we have any discussion on
22 today's agenda?

23 (No response.)

24 RONNIE DANIELS:

25 Do we have a motion to approve today's

1 agenda?

2 CAM ROBERDS:

3 I will make that motion.

4 JASON OSBORNE:

5 I'll second it.

6 RONNIE DANIELS:

7 All in favor?

8 Aye.

9 JONATHAN McLENDON:

10 Aye.

11 JASON OSBORNE:

12 Aye.

13 CAM ROBERDS:

14 Aye.

15 RONNIE DANIELS:

16 All right. Mr. Joe, turn it over to
17 you.

18 JOE SPRAGGINS:

19 Okay. Let's see. We have got spotted
20 seatrout -- spotted seatrout release in -- DMR and
21 USM, and we released quite a -- Rick, how many was
22 that exactly?

23 RICK BURRIS:

24 Matt's got the --

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 Matt has got that. How many was it,
2 Matt, that we released?

3 MATT HILL:

4 It's roughly 250,000 so far, and we have
5 got -- we've got another 100,000 planned for
6 around mid October, but what we are doing -- I'm
7 sorry. Don't be mad at me.

8 JOE SPRAGGINS:

9 She can't hear from back there.

10 MATT HILL:

11 What we are doing this year, we're
12 raising subsets up to -- usually, when we're
13 talking about the fingerlings, they're around two
14 inches when you're releasing them. This year,
15 we're trying something different. We're holding
16 back a subset of fish and raising them to around
17 six to eight inches.

18 We've been fairly successful doing that,
19 and with doing that, we have been able to tag
20 around 1,200 of those with some newer tags. They
21 are called visible elastomer implants, so we can
22 future monitor them. We're trying to get away
23 from the dart tags for a lot of reasons that I
24 don't want to waste your time getting into, but
25 this is more of a dye. That -- it's very visible

1 when the fish comes out the water, so there's no
2 doubt that that fish did come from that the
3 hatchery or from the Thad Cochran Aquaculture
4 Center.

5 So we are doing that, but so once the
6 final numbers come in this year, we're going to
7 have about -- close to 350,000 two-inch
8 fingerlings in the water just for this year, and
9 we're going to have somewhere around 40- to 50,000
10 fish that are in the six to eight-inch range that
11 we will have released.

12 And we actually did -- we weren't as
13 successful as we wanted to be, but we did release
14 some 14- to 16-inch fish. The transport process
15 was a little more difficult than we thought, so a
16 lot of this has been an experimental year. We're
17 learning a lot.

18 But there is a lot going on at the
19 hatchery. Some good. I'm not going to say some
20 bad, but some not as successful as we want. We
21 also do have some -- currently, we are housing 60
22 flounder out there for some future brood stock
23 work that we're going to partner with the Gulf
24 Coast Research Lab.

25 And we also have Mississippi State out

1 there doing a study on oyster drills. And one of
2 the big things that we're most proud of is we have
3 reached out to several of our local high schools.
4 Some of them have taken us up on the offer. We're
5 very involved with that. I guess the poster child
6 right now is Ocean Springs High School. We helped
7 them out a great deal. They have a wonderful
8 program over there. But we have opened up the
9 facility and our resources to all the high
10 schools, so that's something that we're trying to
11 expand on.

12 It is -- I don't know if all of you
13 realize where it's at. It is a little bit of a
14 ride for them to get out there, but we are
15 encouraging that. But we have had a successful
16 year doing some things that we've never done out
17 there, so hopefully we can continue on that.

18 JOE SPRAGGINS:

19 A lot better than what it -- you know,
20 releasing these -- releasing six to eight inches
21 is working pretty well, right?

22 MATT HILL:

23 It is. We still have a few hurdles to
24 overcome. A lot of these, at that size, spotted
25 seatrout are not the most hardy fish in the --

1 they're not quite like the red drum, so when
2 you're transporting them, you have a lot of scale
3 loss, so we're trying to come up with a good --
4 how many can we put in the hauler, basically the
5 best bang for our buck. I mean, we can't make 10
6 trips down there, but if we can limit it to
7 possibly 2-, 3-, 4,000 fish in the hauler at a
8 time, we found that it's much more successful.

9 And something else that we are doing
10 this year, we did -- there was some criticism in
11 the past. So far, we have released these fish in
12 eight different locations, spanning all three
13 coastal counties, so we're going state line to
14 state line the best that we can.

15 We are trying to include some more
16 groups in the tagging process. This particular
17 tagging process is a little bit labor intensive,
18 but to just be completely honest, we have gotten
19 the specifics down. We're not the greatest at it
20 yet with the new tagging technique, so we're
21 trying to hone that down and then get some more --
22 some groups have been interested in coming out
23 there and helping us because it takes an entire
24 day to get these fish tagged and get them back in
25 the pools or the ponds to observe them for a

1 little before we release them. So hopefully in
2 the future years we can get some more groups
3 involved.

4 JOE SPRAGGINS:

5 Okay. Any questions?

6 (No response.)

7 JOE SPRAGGINS:

8 Thank you, Matt.

9 MATT HILL:

10 Yep.

11 JOE SPRAGGINS:

12 As far as employment updates, we've got
13 new hires. We have Glen Terrell, who's a deputy
14 administrator. He's come on and going to do
15 internal affairs and some other work with us.

16 Also promotions, we have Chaz Newman,
17 who is promoted to Environmental/Natural Resource
18 Specialist II in Coastal Resource Management, and
19 we have Nicholas McDaniel, who is promoted to Law
20 Enforcement Officer II/Corporal.

21 We have one contract and it's with NOARC
22 and it's for \$101,000 and it's basically to do
23 artificial reef sidescan data collection for a
24 project.

25 Any questions on those?

1 (No response.)

2 JOE SPRAGGINS:

3 All right. Let's see if I can get back
4 on track now. Bonnet Carré update, Tracy you want
5 to give us a little bit about where we're at on
6 that.

7 TRACI FLOYD:

8 Good morning. So through the deadline,
9 which was September 7th, after a 30-day
10 application period, we had 473 applications come
11 in, 349 commercial fishermen, 50 seafood dealers
12 and 74 charter operators.

13 So right now, in the process, we are
14 still reviewing those last applications that came
15 in. We have some that are -- a couple dozen in
16 appeals, and some of those are going through a
17 legal review with the help of Sandy and her team.
18 So that review will go on probably the next few
19 weeks so we can wrap up what the final numbers are
20 and finalize that calculation.

21 JOE SPRAGGINS:

22 Traci, is there any one of the fields
23 that we have already cleared everyone?

24 TRACI FLOYD:

25 Unfortunately, no. We're still working

1 through a few in each sector, so --

2 JOE SPRAGGINS:

3 Okay. Like, I know, seafood dealers,
4 charter boats and I know the commercial fishermen,
5 we're having a few appeals. But there's appeals
6 in all three areas?

7 TRACI FLOYD:

8 Yes, sir.

9 JOE SPRAGGINS:

10 Okay. That's what's holding it up right
11 now.

12 TRACI FLOYD:

13 Yes. And of course, the last few that
14 came in, it was just so many, we haven't gone
15 through all of them, but we're close.

16 RONNIE DANIELS:

17 What kind of time frame do you think
18 we're looking at there?

19 TRACI FLOYD:

20 As I said, I think we will be a few
21 weeks before we can finalize.

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 It will be how long?

24 TRACI FLOYD:

25 A few weeks. Working as fast as we can,

1 of course.

2 JOE SPRAGGINS:

3 Yeah.

4 RONNIE DANIELS:

5 But the problem is the appeals and --

6 TRACI FLOYD:

7 The appeals and just working through the
8 last ones that came in, you know, at the last
9 minute. We want to give everybody a fair shake,
10 of course.

11 JOE SPRAGGINS:

12 Yeah. We have to -- just for y'all's
13 information, obviously, before we split the money
14 between each one of the categories, we have to be
15 able to go in and know that -- who is going to
16 qualify and exactly how many because, otherwise,
17 we will not have the numbers to be able to do it.

18 Just like a charter boat, you know.
19 We're going to do a split among how many are there
20 of the money that's there, so that will tell
21 exactly what it is. And once we get through all
22 the appeals and get everything settled, then we'll
23 do that.

24 Same thing with the processors. Same
25 thing with the commercial fishermen so that we can

1 make sure that we give the right allocation to
2 each and every one.

3 RONNIE DANIELS:

4 One thing that I asked Matt about, and I
5 think I remember us doing it this way in the past,
6 but instead of holding everybody up for a handful
7 of appeals, didn't -- in the past on one of these,
8 we went ahead and figured out the number on the
9 total applications submitted and set the amount to
10 cover the appeals to the side and went ahead and
11 got the money out to the ones that we knew were
12 approved.

13 JOE SPRAGGINS:

14 You can do that and it depends on which
15 one you're talking about. And just to give you an
16 idea, just say that we took the charter boats,
17 which I know you understand that. But if we took
18 the charter boat side and if we did that and set
19 aside four appeals -- just say there was four of
20 them. Okay? I don't know how many there are --
21 and we set them aside, then that's four people
22 that we've got to hold that amount of money away
23 from. So we would have to hold the amount that
24 everybody was getting.

25 And then we would have to turn around

1 and go back after the thing and give everybody
2 else another dollar or two, and it's a tremendous
3 amount of work to do that. If we can just -- I
4 know the people need the money as soon as
5 possible. And I know that, and I'm not trying
6 to -- and we're trying as hard as we can to get it
7 out as quick as possible, but, you know, to be
8 able to do that is a lot of time-consuming work.

9 And just to give you an idea, too, we
10 were allowed to take -- I don't know. Leslie is
11 not here, is she? But I think it was 17 or 20 --
12 around 20 percent that we could have taken, and we
13 didn't do that. The agency took back what they
14 was -- originally said, was 10 percent or
15 something like that, and so they -- we left that
16 other 10 percent in for the people to be able to
17 get.

18 And so we're trying every way we can to
19 get the money to them, but it is a lot of work, if
20 we have to do it three times or two or three
21 times.

22 TRACI FLOYD:

23 Yes, sir.

24 JOE SPRAGGINS:

25 And then they're not going to get the

1 allocation they deserve to start with.

2 RONNIE DANIELS:

3 Okay. All right. Thank you.

4 TRACI FLOYD:

5 Thank you.

6 JOE SPRAGGINS:

7 Any other questions?

8 (No response.)

9 JOE SPRAGGINS:

10 All right. On-bottom lease, oyster
11 lease update, we're working very hard on that. I
12 don't think -- I know we have went through the
13 process and what happened was, we had four
14 individuals grade their sheets. They were graded
15 as if -- with no names, no amount of acreage or
16 anything. It was just according to what the RFP
17 said as how much are you going to do to this, how
18 much cultch, how much you're going to do and how
19 many -- how long it's going to be done. They were
20 graded according to that by four different
21 individuals and -- three from the agency and one
22 from an agency in another part of the state in
23 wildlife -- I mean, excuse me, in DEQ.

24 And after that, we went back and we saw
25 a couple of discrepancies in there that we had to

1 look at. Rick and them have been working with
2 them to try to solve those few little
3 discrepancies and decide what it was.

4 Then we went back and had an independent
5 study with someone -- with Glen Terrell who works
6 with us, go back and look at all of them again,
7 and he went back and graded them. So, you know,
8 it's -- and not knowing anything about what the
9 others had done, and then he graded his.

10 And so we're coming out very good, to
11 the point that we feel like we're looking at it
12 every way in the world we can to find that this is
13 the proper person to let this person have the
14 right to lease this amount.

15 I can tell you out of the 80
16 applications that the way things were set, it was
17 pretty good and most people got what -- some part
18 of what they wanted. But we don't know what that
19 is at this time and I haven't turned it out. But
20 once again, we have to go, and once we give the
21 Number 1 person, the Number 2 person, Number 3
22 person, they may come back and decide not to lease
23 as much as they wanted or do whatever. If they
24 do, then they'll open up some more and we'll have
25 to go back and regroup.

1 But we've asked -- there have been more
2 asked than we have property to give, and I mean,
3 they've even asked for property that's not
4 permitted. And so we're going to work at that.
5 We'll look at trying to get it permitted. Looks
6 like we'll get it worked out. It's going to take
7 us a little time.

8 But our hope is that everything is going
9 well on that, and Sandy and I and Rick and Patrick
10 and the rest of us have been working on that
11 pretty hard. Hopefully, we will have it solved by
12 next week to where we can do it by the first of
13 October, and that way we will be able to release
14 what we need there.

15 Any questions?

16 (No response.)

17 JOE SPRAGGINS:

18 It's going to be great. I tell you
19 what, I never thought we'd have that type of
20 turnout. Look, there is a lot of people wanting
21 to do this, and I think it will be fantastic that
22 the state now will be able to take two -- well,
23 all but 20 percent. They're getting -- 80 percent
24 of that bottom is going to be cultched in some way
25 by private individuals, which will help a whole

1 lot because they will maintain it and have the
2 access to do it, so I think that's going to be a
3 great deal for us.

4 All right. Monday, September 11th, the
5 Delisle unit of the Wolf River Coastal Preserves
6 is temporarily closed for road work until further
7 notice to maintenance. Recreational activities,
8 including walking the trails, hunting, wildlife
9 watching and camping, will be prohibited during
10 this time, and we will let you know as soon as we
11 can get it opened back up.

12 Cruisin' the Coast, it's coming here,
13 boy, October 2nd. DMR is a title sponsor. This
14 is going to be a great deal. When I say "DMR,"
15 it's not DMR. It's Mississippi Seafood, is a
16 title sponsor. Let's get this straight. It's not
17 DMR. All right? And Mississippi Seafood is a
18 title sponsor, and this is a great idea that they
19 came up with, and Charmaine and Francesca and them
20 have been working hard on this.

21 And what we're trying to do is basically
22 we're going to be set up where they register and
23 we're going to be able to have people that walk
24 right by us to be able to talk about Mississippi
25 Seafood. And we're going to have our own cooking

1 team out there cooking shrimp and all and they're
2 going to be giving them samples of it. And
3 they're going to get to taste the real Mississippi
4 Seafood and they're going to get to taste Gulf
5 Fresh Seafood.

6 Then we're going to be at two or three
7 other locations during that time to where we'll be
8 set up and talking about Mississippi Seafood. And
9 we also have it on the -- we're listed on all
10 their brochures, everything they do. It's going
11 across the whole United States. 30,000 people
12 will register. That's pretty good, 30,000.

13 CHARMAINE SCHMERMUND:

14 Ten.

15 JOE SPRAGGINS:

16 No. It's 10,000 cars, 30,000 people.

17 CHARMAINE SCHMERMUND:

18 Oh, okay.

19 JOE SPRAGGINS:

20 Yeah. They figure three to a car.
21 There's three to a car that's registered, but
22 there will be 10,000 cars, is what they're
23 thinking, which is 30,000 people that will come
24 through registration and that on top of the other
25 70,000-plus they're expecting to be there.

1 So what better way to spend a little bit
2 of money to be able to get the word out about --
3 the Department of Marine Resources also is in
4 that, but the Mississippi Seafood is the main
5 thing. And we're going to be able to give them
6 out, and we're going to have different handouts
7 for them. It's going to talk about Mississippi
8 Seafood. I think there is some -- even may be a
9 recipe or two thrown in there or something. You
10 never know. But I think that will great.

11 So you're riding up and down the Coast
12 and you see -- just to give you an idea as you
13 come into the registration, which will be in
14 Gulfport there at Centennial Plaza -- on the
15 highway there will be big Mississippi Seafood
16 signs that they're going to put up for us and
17 everything else, so it will be -- and we're going
18 to have banners, and I think it will be a great
19 advertisement for us.

20 And I thank y'all for all your hard work
21 on that. Y'all are doing good and let's get it
22 done. And the team is going to all pitch in,
23 everybody from the agency. There is a lot of them
24 working, going to help and be out there at
25 Cruisin' the Coast and helping to be able to

1 support Mississippi Seafood. That's one of our
2 biggest things right now, is being able to get
3 that back out.

4 At one time we were the seafood capitol
5 of the world. We need to get back to it. And how
6 do we do that? It's like this. We have got to
7 get the advertisement, so glad to be able to do
8 that.

9 All right. If you're around on
10 October 10th, Eric Clark -- if you remember, Eric
11 Clark used to be Secretary of State and there's
12 going to be an Eric Clark Coastal Preserves
13 dedication and it's scheduled for Tuesday,
14 October 10th at 1:30 and it's Indian Point Coastal
15 Preserve in Gautier. So we will be hosting that
16 from DMR, and Secretary of State is also involved
17 in it. And so we will be able to do that for him,
18 and I think he is very proud to have that done.
19 It was passed by legislation this year.

20 The other one is Gollott Island, and
21 that's going to be -- I think it's Godfather Point
22 and Gollott Island will come up, but we don't have
23 the exact date on it. Probably in November is
24 what we're shooting for, sometime in November, to
25 be able to do that and have that dedication.

1 We'll let you know when that dedication is for
2 Senator Gollott.

3 Myself and Rick will be at Gulf States
4 Marine Fisheries Commission meeting coming up in
5 New Orleans October 16th through 19th, and I think
6 we go to Panama City for -- what is that -- the
7 last week of the month?

8 RICK BURRIS:

9 Gulf Council.

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 And -- for Gulf Council, so we will be
12 working that.

13 One other thing, an update on derelict
14 vessels, we have a total of 122 that have been
15 turned in. We have 77 that's been removed, 45
16 that are pending removal and five that have
17 received court orders. So we're working hard on
18 that.

19 And I've got something about oyster
20 leasing program, but we already talked about that,
21 right? So I don't think there is anything else I
22 need to talk about.

23 All right. Director, now, the last
24 thing -- director. I am the director.

25 RONNIE DANIELS:

1 Did I get a promotion?

2 JOE SPRAGGINS:

3 Yeah, you got a promotion. Maybe there
4 needs to be something.

5 All right. That completes the agency
6 update.

7 Now, action update from the prior
8 meeting.

9 SANDY CHESNUT:

10 Okay. Discussed at the August 2023
11 meeting, the Commission recommended and the
12 Director approved the motion to table Jay
13 Rubenstein, On the Water and Doug DeLuca's
14 application for after-the-fact exclusion for
15 boathouse and piers on Porteaux Road in Jackson
16 County, Mississippi to provide the applicant the
17 opportunity to submit a survey with dimensions in
18 support of his application. The applicant's
19 deadline for submitting the survey with dimensions
20 August 29th, 2023. I don't believe that was
21 submitted, and I don't think he is on the agenda
22 for today, so -- because we did not get that
23 survey.

24 The second one was the motion to request
25 DMR staff to review the last five years of cobia

1 regulations, recent information on cobia and
2 consider potential changes to regulations, and I
3 do believe that is on the agenda.

4 JOE SPRAGGINS:

5 It is.

6 SANDY CHESNUT:

7 And that's all.

8 JOE SPRAGGINS:

9 All right. Any questions? If not,
10 Commissioner, I will turn this over to you, sir.

11 RONNIE DANIELS:

12 Thank you, Joe. Thank you, Ms. Sandy.

13 Do any of our commissioners have
14 anything to report today?

15 JONATHAN McLENDON:

16 I'm good.

17 RONNIE DANIELS:

18 Everybody good. All right. Not a whole
19 lot going on.

20 We'll move on to Marine Patrol, report
21 on citations, Chief.

22 KYLE WILKERSON:

23 Good morning, Director, Director,
24 Commissioners.

25 August, the last official month of the

1 summer was pretty compliant. I mean, we had 2,000
2 people we checked, 103 citations of -- various
3 ones. I mean, a few fisheries, a few safety
4 violations, a few miscellaneous violations.
5 They're all in there. Nothing really jumps out at
6 me. I mean, unless you have a question that --
7 maybe that I did not catch on that one, just I
8 will field any one you have.

9 JOE SPRAGGINS:

10 Any questions?

11 RONNIE DANIELS:

12 Doesn't look like it. Y'all keep up the
13 good work. Hopefully, it's getting cooler on
14 y'all out there with those black shirts.

15 KYLE WILKERSON:

16 Yes. Yes, indeed, sir, it has. This
17 morning was a blessing, so let's hope there is a
18 few more like that.

19 RONNIE DANIELS:

20 Oh, yeah. Thank you, Chief.

21 KYLE WILKERSON:

22 Thank you.

23 RONNIE DANIELS:

24 Next up is going to be Leslie Brewer
25 with Office of Finance and Administration. Oh,

1 nope.

2 BRANDI BUSBY:

3 No. Leslie is not feeling well this
4 morning, so she asked me to come on down. I'm
5 going to fill in for Leslie.

6 I'm Brandi Busby, the finance director.
7 Let's see. I'll be presenting the agency's
8 financials for the month of August 2023. At the
9 end of August, state revenue was 3.2 million, and
10 total agency revenue was 3.4 million.

11 Our state net income was 2.4 million,
12 and our agency was 1.2.

13 After two months of Fiscal Year '24, the
14 agency has 99 percent budget remaining, while
15 tidelands budget has 98.3 percent remaining.

16 Any questions?

17 RONNIE DANIELS:

18 I don't believe so. Thank you.

19 BRANDI BUSBY:

20 Thank you.

21 RONNIE DANIELS:

22 Ms. Charmaine.

23 CHARMAINE SCHMERMUND:

24 Good morning. The Mississippi
25 Department of Marine Resources had 15 media

1 mentions since the August MACMR meeting. News
2 items included applications for fishermen to
3 receive relief from the 2019 Bonnet Carré Spillway
4 opening, red snapper season re-opening and two
5 menhaden fishing vessels sunk for artificial
6 reefs.

7 The Office of Marine Patrol took part in
8 the Back to School Fair at Lyman Community Center
9 on August 26th, and the CCA Kids Fishing
10 Experience with the City of Gulfport on
11 September 9th.

12 Patrick Levine gave a presentation to
13 the Wings class at Vancleave Upper Elementary on
14 August 29th.

15 Madison Parker with the Shellfish Bureau
16 gave a presentation at a meeting for the
17 Mississippi Gulf Fishing Banks on September 14th
18 at the Biloxi Yacht Club. And employees in the
19 Office of Marine Fisheries and Grand Bay NERR both
20 participated in Science Fest Mississippi Museum of
21 Natural Science in Jackson on September 15th and
22 16th.

23 The fourth class of the 2023-2024
24 Off-bottom Oyster Aquaculture Training Program was
25 held on September 9th at the Ocean Springs Harbor

1 and Deer Island Aquaculture Park. At Ocean
2 Springs Harbor, trainees learned how to count
3 large amounts of seed oysters. MDMR staff and
4 trainees then traveled to the aquaculture park for
5 further hands-on instruction.

6 The agency sponsored the Biloxi Seafood
7 Festival and featured a booth at the festival,
8 which was held September 9th. We had hundreds of
9 visitors at our booth where MDMR staff handed out
10 our publications, fish ruler stickers, various
11 items promoting Mississippi Seafood and the
12 National Heritage area.

13 We launched our annual photo contest
14 where the winning photos will be used in the
15 agency's 2024 calendar, and we ask that submitted
16 photos depict an aspect of the marine resources
17 available on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. These
18 include recreational and commercial fishing,
19 Coastal preserves, marine plant and animal life,
20 marsh areas, boating and Mississippi seafood. The
21 deadline to submit entries is Friday, October 27th
22 and they can be e-mailed to
23 publicaffairs@dmr.ms.gov.

24 RONNIE DANIELS:

25 Busy month.

1 CHARMAINE SCHMERMUND:

2 Uh-huh.

3 RONNIE DANIELS:

4 Thank you, Charmaine.

5 Going to move into Marine Fisheries.

6 Joe, I meant to ask while you were
7 talking a minute ago, do we have an update? Do we
8 know where we are on snapper or what's going on
9 with that?

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 No. We don't have an update at this
12 time. I think what we're doing is we're
13 basically -- we opened the season back up on the
14 1st, but I don't think we have an update at this
15 time. They're still working on it. But I think
16 the season is still going to be open, Trevor,
17 what, another -- till the end of the month, for
18 sure, basically?

19 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

20 Yeah. Likely. I mean, we saw a huge
21 dropoff once Labor Day started -- I mean, Labor
22 Day was bad weather. Ever since then, it's just
23 been kind of slacking. I think that Mississippi
24 State/LSU game kept a whole lot of people at home,
25 and I'm sure some of them thought they should have

1 been out there.

2 RONNIE DANIELS:

3 State fans wish they would have went
4 fishing.

5 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

6 Yep.

7 CAM ROBERDS:

8 Trevor, I've got a quick question. I'm
9 sorry.

10 JOE SPRAGGINS:

11 Go ahead.

12 CAM ROBERDS:

13 What are the -- we ended up with about
14 10,000 more pounds when we started back up on
15 September 1st. Where exactly did that come from?

16 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

17 So essentially, we have been awaiting
18 that increase in our poundage, the 20,000 pounds
19 from the rule, the recalibration rule that went
20 through. And really, what we left off with and
21 what we had was a little bit of flexibility at the
22 end for a little bit of additional poundage.

23 And then we wanted to provide our
24 anglers that opportunity like we traditionally
25 have in -- September 1st, so we opened it up.

1 And, you know, we're still awaiting that timeline
2 of that passing through, but we wanted to go ahead
3 and try to provide our anglers with that
4 opportunity while they had it.

5 CAM ROBERDS:

6 Awesome. Fantastic.

7 RONNIE DANIELS:

8 Anything else?

9 (No response.)

10 RONNIE DANIELS:

11 All right. Thank you, Trevor.

12 Now, cobia.

13 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

14 All right. So it's a fair amount of
15 information here. I'm going to try to go slow and
16 I think we should have a fair amount of discussion
17 on a few of these items.

18 So just as a little bit of background
19 overall for cobia: So they're considered a
20 Coastal migratory pelagic, so they're in the same
21 group as Spanish mackerel and king mackerel. And
22 the main thing that differentiates them from the
23 highly migratory species is they typically inhabit
24 that closest third of the coastline within the
25 EEZ. Whereas, their HMS counterparts, are kind of

1 spread out throughout the entirety of the EEZ, out
2 to 200 nautical miles. Those HMS species are
3 tuna, sharks, things of that nature.

4 The -- currently, the management for
5 cobia is split across zones, so we've got the Gulf
6 where we are, the FLEC Zone, which is the Florida
7 East Coast Zone and the Atlantic. And the main
8 thing to note here is that the Gulf Zone does not
9 have sector allocations split, so this just goes
10 straight split, Gulf Zone ACL, Gulf Zone ABC.
11 There is no split between commercial and
12 recreational.

13 In the FLEC Zone, there is a split
14 between recreational and commercial. And then the
15 Atlantic group there is a lot of regulations by
16 state across there. But for our interest, we're
17 mainly focusing on the Gulf side of things.

18 Mississippi's current regulations are a
19 minimum size of 36 inches fork length and two fish
20 per person, per day.

21 All right. So I'm -- pertinent
22 regulations and statutes that apply to cobia: So
23 for those of you who may not know, cobia is the
24 only game fish that we have in Mississippi
25 designated by state statute. So Mississippi

1 49-15-3, game fish means cobia, also known as ling
2 or lemon fish. The cobia is classified as a game
3 fish.

4 And then 49-15-76 states that it is
5 unlawful for any person to sell, barter or trade
6 or to offer for sale, barter or trade any game
7 fish. So cobia is automatically included there,
8 and that is reiterated in our regulations in Title
9 22 Part 3. It is unlawful to sell, offer for
10 sale, barter, trade, or purchase cobia landed in
11 Mississippi.

12 And then like I said, size and bag
13 limits, that 36 inches fork length was adopted in
14 2020. And the two fish per person, per day is
15 what's in our current regulations in Title 22
16 Part 3.

17 So I mentioned there was a length limit
18 change. That was established 2020. That actually
19 passed the Council, I think, a couple of years
20 before that and it took a little while to get
21 through and be finalized. That was really
22 predicated on a lot of stakeholder concern across
23 the entire Gulf and some looks at the size of
24 maturity and a couple of analyses, and they
25 basically came to a couple of options of 33, 36,

1 42.

2 And I think it -- you know, Clarence
3 kind of mentioned it the last meeting, but that
4 42-inch just kind of gets you beyond the realm
5 of -- you know, you can't really net a fish that
6 size and bring it in the boat. There's some
7 logistical concerns. Some, you know, people that
8 might be gaffing and killing these fish will
9 increase mortality, so 36 was settled on as the
10 increase and that's what was passed.

11 Now, shortly after that finalization of
12 what was passed, SEDAR 28 was completed which was
13 a Gulfwide assessment on cobia. And it showed
14 that overfishing had been occurring on the species
15 since 1975. They weren't overfished, but
16 overfishing was occurring.

17 Just a note about SEDAR 28, for a lot of
18 our species -- and I have mentioned it for spotted
19 seatrout and it goes for a lot of the other
20 federally-managed species -- we rely heavily on
21 both fishery-independent indexes and the
22 fishery-dependent side. So the
23 fishery-independent are the highly standardized
24 gears and -- which target these species that give
25 you a -- kind of a representative index of their

1 relative abundance over time. It should be more
2 stable. It's a little bit more relied upon.

3 For these Coastal migratory pelagics, we
4 really don't have a fishery-independent index.
5 There's no real gear to be able to get to, to be
6 able to standardize and have that running. So
7 this assessment really relied on fishery-dependent
8 indexes and removals, and that's basically -- what
9 it showed was decreasing removals, so decreasing
10 harvest over time, which led to that current
11 status.

12 Now, that passed the SSC and went
13 through the Council and everything else, but I
14 wanted to mention that, in this consideration,
15 this would be a little bit more data limited than
16 what we consider for a lot of our other species
17 that are managed throughout the Gulf.

18 Based on the results of SEDAR 28, there
19 was a need to reduce harvest by 33 percent, so by
20 a third, so trying to decrease the fishing
21 mortality across the board. And what essentially
22 was established was federal bag and vessel limits,
23 one per person, two per vessel. In the next
24 slide, I will go through exactly how it went from
25 two per person overall down to this strict metric.

1 And then here on the right, I have got a
2 table of the state and federal regulations to
3 date, and what you can see is that for -- all
4 these states have adopted the one per person, two
5 per vessel, except for Mississippi, which is two
6 per person, and Texas, which is 40 inches total
7 length and two per person.

8 Now, there is amendment to be made from
9 this table. When I made this table, that was the
10 regulation, but as of September 1st, Texas has
11 moved to one per person. That is their current
12 regulation. They did not establish the vessel
13 limit. They thought the one-per-person metric was
14 adequate enough and wanted to go there before
15 adopting for federal consistency.

16 All right. So we talked a little bit
17 about, you know, kind of the definition of the
18 Coastal migratory pelagics, where they exist, how
19 they operate. It's -- you know, basically the
20 structure of this group is that they spend time in
21 the south, whether it be to the west or to the
22 east, and they migrate across the northern Gulf as
23 temperatures increase throughout the summertime
24 and everything else. And while they're migrating,
25 they're spawning all along this pathway and

1 encountering anglers and everything else, so, you
2 know, they've got a fairly broad distribution and
3 they're harvested across different states.

4 Now, I talked about us not having a lot
5 of fishery-independent information, but luckily,
6 we have got a plethora of tag and release data
7 from the Sport Fish Tag and Release Program we've
8 funded for decades with Jim Franks and USM.

9 So Dave Dippold, who I went to school
10 with actually, did an analysis of this tag
11 recapture data, and basically it was a large-scale
12 work that looked at this species and kind of gave
13 us a good bit of insight that we wouldn't have
14 unless we had this information.

15 So you can see here on this map on the
16 right, we have got basically the tagging regions
17 split by all these boxes, so you've got Florida
18 Keys, the Atlantic, Florida Panhandle, north
19 central GOM and Louisiana.

20 And essentially, what I wanted to
21 highlight -- we've got a lot of results, but I
22 wanted to focus us on this figure here. So what
23 you see in the boxes are basically boxes by month.
24 And where you see blue, it's essentially looking
25 at the residuals, but that blue basically

1 indicates an above-average, an above-expected
2 amount of tag and recaptures. And what this does
3 is help illustrate the spatial and temporal
4 difference in which these fish are harvested and
5 targeted across the entire Gulf.

6 So if we focus on the north central Gulf
7 of Mexico, all right, we don't really see much
8 harvest, negligible actually. Decreased harvest
9 in the months of -- this is the boxes -- January
10 February, March and April, average harvest, and
11 then we see increased harvest in August and
12 September. And if you compare that to the Florida
13 Panhandle, you see a large amount of tagging
14 happening in the month of April, which coincides
15 with their tournaments, everything else they have
16 going.

17 And then the Florida Keys, right, this
18 is the important thing to highlight. You see that
19 harvest kind of occurring in the winter months
20 because they are overwintering down in the Florida
21 Keys and they're basically staging up to begin
22 their migrations again. Now, I say this for a
23 point I'm about to get to, is that, essentially
24 these fish are targeted across this entire range
25 and a large amount of the mortality occurs in

1 these areas that have a larger angler population.
2 So they're getting harvested in the Keys in the
3 wintertime. They're passing Tampa and hitting
4 that group. They're passing the Big Bend and
5 getting hit by that group. They're going through
6 Pensacola and getting hit by that group, and then
7 they make it to us for us to be able to harvest
8 them and mainly that occurs in the fall with our
9 fall runs.

10 And so one of the things and one of the
11 reasons why the regulations went as strict as they
12 did, as fast as they did is because it had to be
13 based on a vessel and angler harvest metric. So
14 here, this figure on the bottom left, you've got
15 the number of cobia harvested per vessel on the X
16 and the percentage of trips that do so on the Y.
17 And essentially, you can see that once you get
18 beyond two, there are not many trips that are
19 encountered that are harvesting over two fish per
20 vessel, and the per-angler rates are even smaller.
21 It basically goes -- starts at one and then
22 collapses off.

23 So if you're looking at the maximum
24 percent decrease, right, if you're trying to get
25 to 33 percent -- which they couldn't do with us

1 anyway, so they basically got the maximum that
2 they could and dropped it down to two fish per
3 vessel, which corresponded to a nine percent
4 decrease. You know, that's the reason why it went
5 from two per person and shrunk all the way down,
6 because in order to get some measurable decrease
7 in mortality, they had to drop it all the way to
8 there.

9 And so if we think about this from a
10 larger-scale fishery management sense, right, just
11 take it away from a single species, just as cobia
12 in general, there is a lot to be said for
13 providing opportunity to our anglers for some of
14 these federal species. And I know a lot of you
15 have probably been through this for a couple of
16 decades and seen essentially seasonal distribution
17 of species that have kind of restricted our access
18 to these fisheries. Not only do we have -- you
19 know, we're kind of -- only a couple of species
20 that we're able to target really close. We don't
21 have the bottom until you get way offshore, so
22 that limits the amount of folks that can target
23 things like beeliners or porgies or anything else
24 like that. But you also have the amberjack
25 seasons and the triggerfish seasons that started

1 in the spring, right, where we have winds that
2 don't allow our anglers to go out and target.

3 And so there's some consideration here
4 when you're thinking about this species that we
5 could be providing our anglers access to a federal
6 species because -- you know, and balance that out
7 with the restricted access on a lot of the other
8 ones.

9 And the other case to be made is that at
10 the end of the day, the harvest coming out of our
11 state for this species, really any shift in it
12 won't have a measurable impact in the overall
13 Gulfwide stock because the bulk of the mortality
14 is occurring in other states and other areas.
15 That doesn't mean that a change to a more
16 conservative pathway won't yield positive results.
17 It's a measurable impact at the assessment level
18 because our harvest is small compared to other
19 states and everything else. It's just the fact of
20 the matter.

21 And the last I'll lead off -- or the
22 last thing I'll end with before we have some
23 questions, essentially you have MRIP landings here
24 for Mississippi and Gulfwide. And I'm sure y'all
25 have gotten plenty of earfuls about MRIP at this

1 point when it pertains to red snapper. And those
2 concerns don't stop here with cobia, right. Same
3 concerns happen of overestimation and these
4 partitionings of effort and everything else.

5 But the thing I wanted to point for our
6 figure here for Mississippi is that we have got a
7 fair proportion of landings that occur in state
8 waters within three nautical miles. And for those
9 folks that fish over in Gulfport and to the west,
10 you know exactly where that's kind of coming from.
11 Those fish push in in the fall. They get in close
12 on our structures that are within the Sound and on
13 the Gulfport Ship Channel and our anglers are able
14 to target and access them and be able to catch
15 them, so we have got a fair amount of harvest that
16 occurs in state waters rather than it strictly all
17 being out in federal waters beyond three miles.

18 And then if you will, look at the
19 Gulfwide landings, so this just -- I'm just trying
20 to add on to this point here. So if you look at
21 the red, which is Florida, they have really got
22 the bulk of the landings because they are
23 targeting this fish from the Florida Keys all the
24 way up to the Panhandle. They have got a larger
25 population than us. They've just got an over -- a

1 lot higher amount of harvesting than what we have.
2 So their changes, their regulatory changes across
3 the board to a more conservative measure will
4 likely have a lot higher impact when it comes to
5 this stock across the board.

6 And with that, I will take any questions
7 y'all may have.

8 RONNIE DANIELS:

9 Trevor, we're going to let Mr. Johnny
10 Marquez -- he has got a public comment on this
11 topic.

12 JOHNNY MARQUEZ:

13 Good morning. Johnny Marquez. I am the
14 director of Coastal Policy and Programs for the
15 Mississippi Wildlife Federation.

16 And there is a lot of -- a lot to talk
17 about here. The -- just by the way of background,
18 I do a lot with the Gulf Council. I sit on the
19 Reef Fish AP, the Data Collection AP and
20 participated in this process. Although I'm not on
21 the AP, I was in the meeting when they were
22 talking about the changing in cobia regs.

23 And Trevor did a great job in
24 highlighting how this came about, but a couple of
25 things I would like to add to it. In 2017, 2018,

1 around that time frame, anglers started noticing a
2 decrease in cobia populations. And as Trevor
3 mentioned, there was really kind of an outcry from
4 the fisherman to the Council to do something. And
5 then, you know, really, the big tournaments over
6 in Destin and Orange Beach, they were noticing a
7 big dropoff in fish and something was going on.

8 Not unlike what we had here with
9 flounder, you know. Something happened with
10 flounder, couldn't quite explain it, and so they
11 went to the Council and asked the Council to take
12 some measure.

13 The Council was working on a stock
14 assessment at the time and kind of waited --
15 wanted to wait to get the results of the stock
16 assessment, but they agreed to take some measure
17 and didn't want to do anything real severe before
18 the stock assessment came out. And so they agreed
19 to go to this increase in size length, so that was
20 a good interim measure.

21 The stock assessment comes out and
22 that's in 2020, and then they start having
23 discussions about taking additional measures. The
24 thing that's a problem to me, typical with federal
25 management, the terminal year for the data on the

1 stock assessment was 2018 before the size length
2 increase went into effect, so now they're making
3 decisions on old data that don't look at whether
4 the size increase had any measure or had any
5 impact.

6 And then when we started having
7 discussions in the advisory panel about this, it
8 does give me some heartburn. As he -- as Trevor
9 showed sort of how the fish are migrating, it's
10 managed as a Gulfwide species, but Florida is
11 getting this really big crack at them because they
12 migrate along the Florida coast. The AP Panel is
13 largely populated with eastern Gulf people or it
14 was at the time, and so, you know, their opinion
15 is, well, one fish per person should be fine.

16 Mississippi's fishery is kind of
17 different. You know, we know we get a push of
18 fish in the spring. They come along with the
19 migration. They head out toward Chandeleur and
20 then they move off into structure in the -- into
21 the summer. So for us to access the fishery other
22 than this window we get in the fall, you're having
23 to run offshore. So the snapper is closed. If
24 amberjack is closed, it's kind of hard to make the
25 justification to make the trip and go fish when

1 you -- you know, for two fish, so I appreciate
2 that Mississippi did not go along with what the
3 feds did.

4 Of course, the first priority is the
5 stock, not just angler access. I'm sorry.

6 RONNIE DANIELS:

7 Go ahead and finish your comment.

8 JOHNNY MARQUEZ:

9 Well, I just think that we are better
10 off doing our own thing. This is a good example
11 where you used to have regional management. We
12 access the fishery differently than Florida does.
13 We shouldn't be held to what -- you know, how
14 Florida accesses the fishery.

15 It's no different than, you know, for
16 grouper this year they wanted to change the season
17 to open November, December. That effectively cuts
18 us out of the fishery. Nobody is wanting to fish
19 for grouper in November and December when nothing
20 else is open. That's great they can do that in
21 Tampa. We can't.

22 So, you know, I appreciate Mississippi
23 taking a different approach in how they look at
24 this. And I think it needs to be kept in mind
25 that the data we're looking at here is not all

1 current data on the stock assessment and where the
2 fishery is. So I think something more, in
3 between, than this very drastic change, one fish
4 per person and two per boat, is warranted because
5 that data is not accurate.

6 RONNIE DANIELS:

7 So what are y'all's thought on it?

8 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

9 You know, I think Johnny highlighted
10 them pretty well, right, and that was -- one of
11 the points I didn't make that I regret, but we
12 talked about it a little bit last time, is this
13 compiling of regulations quickly over a short time
14 period without seeing how those regulations play
15 out in the stock and long-term.

16 I mean, if you look back, I can go back
17 one slide to the landings. Mind going back one,
18 Karen? You see a slight uptick in 2022 with the
19 amount of Florida landings that are coming
20 through. I don't know if any of this truly
21 changes the output of the assessment, right,
22 because we have seen decreasing removals in the
23 commercial sector. We do see a slight increase
24 here, but those are highly variable when it comes
25 down to it.

1 You know, the Texas route, they didn't
2 see the justification to go completely strict and
3 go to a two-per-vessel limit. They simply said,
4 all right, we'll cut it back, take a conservative
5 measure, but we're not going to go that far and
6 we'll just leave it at one per person.

7 Now, the options that are presented to
8 all of y'all for, you know, potential
9 recommendations are anything within the realm of
10 what we have now, right? You've got the status
11 quo option of let's just keep it the way it is.
12 You've got the look at it like Texas where you
13 just decrease the bag limit to one per person.
14 You've got the option of establishing some vessel
15 limit. Now, you know, I don't quite see the
16 justified need to go down to two per vessel, but
17 you could think about something that might be a
18 little bit higher than that.

19 When these discussions were going on
20 with the Council, we tried to bring in options
21 that were, you know, two per person, four per
22 vessel, one per person, three to five per vessel,
23 something within there that's a stepwise down --
24 it's steps down, but it's not so strict that it
25 just completely takes it to one of the most

1 strictly managed fisheries in the entire Gulf of
2 Mexico.

3 And then, you know, we have only had one
4 angler come up and provide comment. We have done
5 workshops in the past. The Gulf Council held a
6 workshop here before the regulations went through.
7 That was attended by a total of three members of
8 the public.

9 But that's a consideration, to go down
10 and discuss. I mean, really, this one comes down
11 to it's -- there is no strict recommendation that
12 can come out of our group that's justified in any
13 manner. There is a fair amount of flexibility
14 here. A conservative measure probably has a
15 positive impact. Will it have a measurable
16 impact? No. Is it something to at least discuss?
17 I mean, I think it's worth it. We have definitely
18 held -- heard from our anglers as far as, you
19 know, there is a fair proportion of them that
20 might want to step in a conservative direction.
21 That's just one of those things we can kind of
22 discuss through.

23 JASON OSBORNE:

24 So who is the last state before Texas to
25 change theirs?

1 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

2 I believe it was -- so Louisiana was
3 pretty quick. I think Louisiana and Alabama were
4 around the same time frame.

5 JASON OSBORNE:

6 How long ago was that?

7 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

8 I think it was 2021, 2022, somewhere
9 around in there. Florida actually implemented the
10 regulation prior to the federal regulation. They
11 already had it in place.

12 JASON OSBORNE:

13 And has there been any data that's come
14 out to show what impact that had or --

15 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

16 I mean, the only thing you have there is
17 just the landings for right now. I don't have
18 any gauge on the length distributions, whether
19 that's actually shifted to where they're seeing a
20 larger proportion of fish that are over 40 inches
21 or whatever else. I haven't seen anything like
22 that.

23 It's kind of like the flounder scenario
24 where you've probably got some fishing mortality
25 that affects it, but you also have other -- since

1 it is, you know, a pretty wide-ranging migratory
2 species, environmental impacts probably have a
3 little bit of play here so you could have
4 instances where -- well, let's just talk about
5 this year, right? This year is a little bit of an
6 anomaly with not a lot of rainfall and everything
7 else. That could lead to a spur in recruitment
8 for a lot of our species that, you know, rears its
9 head two or three years down the road from now and
10 brings in a higher catch. It might not
11 necessarily be based on a regulatory change on the
12 fishing regime, but it could be environmental, so
13 there's just -- there is a lot of stuff at play
14 here and a lot of uncertainty with the species.

15 And I know when there is uncertainty,
16 the tendency of managers, especially on the
17 federal side, are to go more conservative to
18 adjust for that uncertainty, and I just don't
19 quite see that side of it on our end, yet going
20 that conservative that fast.

21 JASON OSBORNE:

22 And if cobia has been on -- the
23 designation is the least concern? Is that right?
24 Is that the right terminology?

25 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

1 Yeah. I mean, it's like a lot of the
2 harvested species. There is not much concern with
3 them.

4 I guess, you know, one of the things
5 that's hard to fathom, right, you've got
6 amberjack, you've got red snapper, you've got all
7 these different species that are targeted
8 federally and essentially what happened when we
9 made that regulation is it went from -- you know,
10 let's just say averagely managed, right? It's got
11 two per person across the board, you know, the
12 size limit that's above the average length of
13 maturity, so it was relatively open for harvest.
14 To go from that scale down to one of the most
15 strict managed -- strictly managed species on the
16 terms of like almost amberjack level where you're
17 establishing vessel limits and everything else and
18 you're at one per person, I mean, that's a huge
19 change. That's just hard to -- in all honesty,
20 it's hard to swallow as a manager. It's hard to
21 look at that and say, that's the right move.

22 JASON OSBORNE:

23 Yeah. I just wonder, you know, when you
24 put them on the -- when they're on the targeted
25 list and they're at the bottom of that list,

1 right, how long ago was that? And then what's
2 been the change since they have been put on and
3 these regulations have come in? I mean, has the
4 population -- has it gotten better in the eyes of
5 the feds or is it still the same?

6 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

7 That's one of the things we don't --
8 there is no knowledge of it, right? What
9 scales -- what scales biomass and assessments,
10 right? I know you've got some familiarity because
11 you talked about the max exceedance and everything
12 else. What scales biomass assessments and --
13 assessment is removals. Plain and simple, right?
14 Recreational and commercial removals combined
15 allow you to see how much the stock is resilient,
16 how it can, you know, bounce back from certain
17 levels of removals and everything, which helps
18 establish ACLs for species and everything else
19 like that. That's the only way we would be able
20 to have -- to estimate relative abundance and
21 biomass assessments are removals, and in order to
22 do that, they have to run another assessment.

23 If there were some fishery-independent
24 index that we could lean on as a health check like
25 we do for red snapper, red grouper, and a lot of

1 the other species and even our inshore species
2 like spotted seatrout, I think we would be in a
3 different discussion point. We'd be able to kind
4 of look at it and say, oh, yeah, we're
5 encountering more and more.

6 So right now, the only thing we have is
7 the anecdotal side of things, which is what
8 fishermen are encountering, and to my knowledge,
9 we have seen a healthy push of cobia this year,
10 and we saw a pretty good one last fall. Now, how
11 that compares to the last 20 years, I'm sure it's
12 less than what we saw 20 years ago, but the
13 question is, are we to the point where it's so low
14 that we need to make a drastic change or not and I
15 just don't think we're quite there.

16 JOE SPRAGGINS:

17 Trevor, one thing. I want you to notice
18 the very top up there where it says "MRIP
19 landings."

20 RONNIE DANIELS:

21 Yeah. Those letters --

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 And MRIP landing is the same thing that
24 NOAA used to cause us to get where we're at with
25 such a skewed number that has no way to be vetted

1 for snapper. Why is Mississippi worried when they
2 are using the same idea on cobia? So that means
3 that we are not catching near the number of cobia
4 they think we are. So what are we really doing?
5 Are we really hurting the population? I don't
6 think so. We have such a small amount of
7 fishermen compared to -- take Florida or take
8 Texas or take Alabama or take Louisiana and the
9 amount of fishermen compared to what we have. And
10 MRIP does not work for Mississippi. We know that.
11 They know that. Why are we concerned about it?

12 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

13 Yeah. I mean, I put this one up there
14 just to illustrate that there is a difference in
15 the regions in which we're catching fish here, and
16 we're catching them in state waters. Now, you can
17 see the large amount of variability on that figure
18 for Mississippi. It goes from zero for some
19 years, right, which in 2010, I mean, I get it.
20 That's the oil spill. 2012, having zero, that's
21 not realistic. And to go from that number down to
22 that number, right, it illustrates how variable it
23 is.

24 The only thing that the figure on the
25 right is for is to show that Florida has the

1 magnitude of landings. That's higher than anyone
2 else, so it's likely that the impact that they're
3 having is a lot larger in scale and to help, you
4 know, just reiterate the fact that any change we
5 have probably is not going to have a measurable
6 effect on the Gulfwide stock.

7 Does that mean that it's not going to
8 have a positive impact? No. A measurable impact?
9 I don't think it's going to have one. So like I
10 said, this is a tough one because we don't really
11 have a direct recommendation to be able to lean on
12 scientifically or otherwise. I mean, we're
13 sitting in a spot where I like to bring in, you
14 know, a fair amount of the discussion points like
15 angler opportunity and what we can do to build a
16 balanced access to this fishery and not take away
17 something from our anglers that we have access to
18 and, you know, it seems like it's a fairly good
19 fishery that fits for us, which there's a lot of
20 federal species that just don't fit for us.

21 JASON OSBORNE:

22 I guess is there movement to change this
23 in the legislature or is the --

24 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

25 Not within the legislature.

1 Essentially, what we have is just -- yeah. We've
2 had stakeholders come up, so Clarence came up.
3 We've had calls come up and everything else. So
4 it's mainly just stakeholder concern about the
5 difference between the federal regs and ours.

6 RONNIE DANIELS:

7 Johnny, did you have another point?

8 JOHNNY MARQUEZ:

9 Yeah. I just wanted to make one
10 other --

11 RONNIE DANIELS:

12 Come on up so she can hear you.

13 JOHNNY MARQUEZ:

14 I just wanted to make one other point
15 concerning -- about Mississippi kind of being the
16 outlier or renegade. It's important to remember
17 that when the Gulf Council increased the size
18 limit from 33 to 36 inches, Florida, who has a
19 nine-mile Coastal border, not three miles, was not
20 compliant with that. They stuck with 33. They
21 went to one fish per person, but they didn't go to
22 the 36.

23 JOE SPRAGGINS:

24 In the state.

25 JOHNNY MARQUEZ:

1 So, you know, they're the ones taking
2 the -- they're the ones now calling for some sort
3 of change, and I feel like we're paying the big
4 price, but we're not an outlier.

5 JOE SPRAGGINS:

6 Yeah. What you're saying is the --
7 in-state Florida, the nine miles, they stayed at
8 33.

9 JOHNNY MARQUEZ:

10 Right. That's where they're catching
11 all their fish.

12 JOE SPRAGGINS:

13 That's right.

14 CAM ROBERDS:

15 We're at the end of the migration. I
16 mean, it's unfortunate, but we're stuck at the,
17 you know, tail end.

18 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

19 Yeah, right at the top.

20 CAM ROBERDS:

21 I mean, it's hard.

22 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

23 I didn't mention this either, but it's a
24 good point to make. We talked about it last time.
25 You go down this route, all right, you make a

1 strict regulation, the odds of ever having the
2 evidence or ever having the science to be able to
3 increase that bag limit is likely never going to
4 come from the federal side. Once you make a
5 regulation down this far, it's -- I don't know if
6 I have ever seen one outside of king mackerel like
7 five years ago where the bag limit of a species
8 actually increased.

9 CAM ROBERDS:

10 And based on the ratios, I know it's
11 MRIP, but the ratios of Mississippi, Florida,
12 Alabama, I mean, we're just -- it's minimal.

13 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

14 Uh-huh.

15 CAM ROBERDS:

16 And then, you know, again, once we get
17 three miles out, we're in federal regulations
18 anyways.

19 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

20 Yep.

21 CAM ROBERDS:

22 It's just tight.

23 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

24 So it's a very small part of the fishery
25 that we're able to access and give anglers

1 opportunity to.

2 RONNIE DANIELS:

3 I mean, I'm fine with leaving it the way
4 it is and seeing what happens over the next year
5 or two.

6 JONATHAN McLENDON:

7 Yeah. I'm not inclined to place any
8 additional regulations on the fishermen of
9 Mississippi here.

10 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

11 All right.

12 CAM ROBERDS:

13 I think the data that you brought
14 forward really gave us some perspective, so --

15 RONNIE DANIELS:

16 I have gotten a lot of calls on this as
17 well, but you brought up a really good point. I
18 mean, our area is this big (indicating), so -- and
19 I agree with you that there is a potential for
20 some type of positive impact, but we just don't
21 have enough impact to make a whole lot of -- a
22 whole lot of change in what's happening.

23 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

24 Right.

25 JOE SPRAGGINS:

1 I'm not sure if we caught five fish per
2 day, per person we would make any difference.

3 RONNIE DANIELS:

4 Yeah, yeah. All right. We good?

5 JONATHAN McLENDON:

6 Yep.

7 RONNIE DANIELS:

8 All right. Thank you for that, Trevor.

9 JASON OSBORNE:

10 Appreciate it.

11 JONATHAN McLENDON:

12 Thanks, Trevor.

13 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

14 Let's move on to an easier subject.

15 RONNIE DANIELS:

16 Yeah.

17 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

18 All right. Saltwater fishing records,
19 we've got three of them. The first one, is a
20 black triggerfish -- something we don't see very
21 often -- *Melichthys niger*. New record is two
22 pounds, 9.14 ounces. The angler is Mr. Bryon
23 Ratliff. There is the fish. There is the angler
24 with the fish.

25 The next one we have is another all

1 tackle. It's the Atlantic blue tang, *Acanthurus*
2 *coeruleus*. New record is one pound, 3.2 ounces.
3 The angler is Mr. Sean Cook. There is the picture
4 of the fish. There is Mr. Cook with the fish.

5 And the last one we have is a pretty
6 impressive one, yellowedge grouper. The old
7 record is 35 pounds, 5.7 ounces. The new record
8 is 41 pounds, 12.8 ounces by Mr. Wesley Butler.
9 There is a picture of the fish, and there is a
10 Mr. Butler with that fish.

11 And all we need is a motion to adopt
12 those new state records.

13 JONATHAN McLENDON:

14 I will make a motion.

15 RONNIE DANIELS:

16 I will second the motion.

17 All in favor?

18 CAM ROBERDS:

19 Aye.

20 JASON OSBORNE:

21 Aye.

22 RONNIE DANIELS:

23 All right.

24 JASON OSBORNE:

25 What happened to that high school kid?

1 He didn't go fishing last month?

2 RONNIE DANIELS:

3 Rodie Armes? I don't know, man. He
4 must have too many --

5 JOE SPRAGGINS:

6 Rodie is probably on probation or
7 something.

8 RONNIE DANIELS:

9 He is running out of wall space.

10 JONATHAN McLENDON:

11 He is playing football.

12 RONNIE DANIELS:

13 All right. Do we have any other
14 business today?

15 JOE SPRAGGINS:

16 I just want to bring up one thing. When
17 we're talking about the snapper and all, we are
18 working with Gulf Council on some stuff on it, and
19 one of the things that we're working on is there
20 is a proposal that we would basically --
21 Mississippi and Alabama would fall in line with
22 LA Creel, which is Louisiana's process of how they
23 do it.

24 And they are willing to look at that,
25 and what we've asked of them is I have asked them,

1 I've said, okay, we're -- Mississippi will be on
2 board with this and we will do a side study. And
3 what it would be is it would happen -- if it
4 happened next year -- I don't know whether it will
5 or not, but if it happened next year, we would go
6 side by side with the standard that we have been
7 doing and then we turn around and do LA Creel with
8 it.

9 And they would give us some money to do
10 it. They've got some extra money, about
11 \$20 million, to do some projects with and this
12 would be one of those things that we could work
13 with that the federal government -- in that case,
14 it would give us -- to be able to look at not just
15 snapper. Then we could look at all species, and
16 that would be something that could be beneficial
17 to the State of Mississippi in the future. It
18 could also help us with our allocation if it
19 matches up the way it would and it would also stop
20 some of the stuff that we are -- we're getting
21 punished for right now.

22 So what I have told them is, I'm more
23 than glad to work with this if we can do it in the
24 short term, but I don't want to wait five years to
25 find out that this is what we're going to do. And

1 if we can work it out -- and that's what we're
2 working on. We've got a meeting next month.
3 We're going to talk more about this.

4 But NOAA is on board with it. Alabama
5 is on board with it. Louisiana is going to --
6 willing to give us all the information to help us
7 do it. I think it's a great idea that if it works
8 and if we can get this pushed through in the short
9 term, I think it could change a lot about what we
10 get as far as allocations and everything else as
11 far as the State of Mississippi, and we could also
12 have a lot better understanding. Just like what
13 we were talking about today with cobia, we would
14 have a better understanding of what we're talking
15 about. We would have a better understanding of
16 the fish that we have, and so I think it would be
17 something that we could very well use.

18 Trevor, Matt, Rick, any of y'all.

19 RICK BURRIS:

20 Yeah. Just the timeline perspective, so
21 Mississippi and Alabama, we're going to go to
22 Baton Rouge the 2nd of October, and we're going to
23 their staff and go over LA Creel and how they --
24 how they operate it and we're going to put that
25 into our own -- we're going to take it back and

1 we're going to talk about it. And then we're
2 going to meet with the Gulf States Marine
3 Fisheries Commission, I think, two weeks after
4 that, us -- all states collectively and try to
5 figure out how to navigate through this. And then
6 we'll meet again the following week with the Gulf
7 Council.

8 So the things are in motion and
9 hopefully we can come up to a -- come up with a
10 solution to be able to integrate this and probably
11 as soon as we can. We would like to next year. I
12 don't know if it's going to be January, but things
13 are in motion. Things are in process, so it's --
14 if it all goes well, it could be something that
15 works for us, because LA Creel is a -- it's a very
16 good survey, like Director said, across the board
17 for all fisheries, so we should be collecting
18 better information.

19 RONNIE DANIELS:

20 Is that the thing that they do where
21 they make the random phone calls or --

22 RICK BURRIS:

23 Yeah. So right now, with MRIP, they
24 send out a letter. It's a mail --

25 RONNIE DANIELS:

1 No, no. I'm talking about LA Creel.

2 RICK BURRIS:

3 Yeah, that's what -- that's what I'm
4 getting at. So MRIP sends -- sends you a letter
5 in the mail and you've got -- a survey in the mail
6 you've got to fill out. LA Creel does weekly and,
7 I think -- or biweekly phone calls.

8 TREVOR MONCRIEF:

9 Weekly.

10 RICK BURRIS:

11 Weekly phone scalls. So they're
12 constantly calling their anglers talking about the
13 week before, rather than MRIP saying, did you fish
14 this month or did you -- how many times did you
15 fish in the last year. You're getting essentially
16 weekly updates as far as effort goes, so it's a
17 much better effort survey.

18 JOE SPRAGGINS:

19 There is a couple of things there. You
20 know, obviously, we have some rules in Mississippi
21 that may be different than Louisiana. We're
22 having to look at that. That's one of the things
23 about being able to call someone, so we are being
24 able to look -- we're looking at that to see where
25 we're at with it.

1 The other thing is, too, that -- as I
2 told them when we had the meeting that night and I
3 explained to them, I said, you know, when no NOAA
4 said and the Commerce come in and said the states
5 can set up their own way of doing any type of
6 surveys, right, well, each state went out and did
7 an individual-type survey. You know, Alabama has
8 got theirs. Mississippi has got theirs.
9 Louisiana has got theirs. Florida has got theirs,
10 Texas. We do our own surveys.

11 Well, it came back and what they didn't
12 tell us is that we are not going to certify
13 anything other than -- basically, if we didn't
14 fall into a category the way that Florida and LA
15 Creel was doing, then they wasn't going to be able
16 to justify with us, and we wasn't going to be able
17 to do it.

18 Well, first off, Mississippi has got the
19 best one in the United States, but it can't be
20 used because it wasn't -- didn't meet the
21 criteria. It's their fault. They're the ones
22 that made the mistake, and I let them know that
23 that night. And they made the mistake and they
24 know they made the mistake. And they should have
25 told us up front what they were going, but, no,

1 they played Mother May I and just went back and
2 said, you know, we'll wait and whenever time
3 comes, we'll just slap them on the hands and say,
4 yep, you didn't do what I told you.

5 And that's exactly what's happening out
6 here, and I'm about up to here (indicating) with
7 it. And so we're going to work, but I'm not going
8 to do it unless they're going to move and they're
9 going to move quickly. Other than that,
10 Mississippi is coming out from under MRIP.

11 RONNIE DANIELS:

12 I like the sounds of that.

13 CAM ROBERDS:

14 Really.

15 RONNIE DANIELS:

16 Do we have any other public comments
17 today, Joe?

18 CAM ROBERDS:

19 I don't think anybody can beat that.

20 RONNIE DANIELS:

21 Yeah, mic drop.

22 JOE SPRAGGINS:

23 I mic dropped them.

24 RONNIE DANIELS:

25 All right. If we don't have any public

1 comments, thank y'all, everyone. Good stuff
2 today.

3 Do we have a motion to adjourn?

4 JONATHAN McLENDON:

5 I will make it.

6 RONNIE DANIELS:

7 I will second it.

8 All in favor?

9 JASON OSBORNE:

10 Aye.

11 JONATHAN McLENDON:

12 Aye.

13 CAM ROBERDS:

14 Aye.

15 RONNIE DANIELS:

16 Everybody have a great day.

17 (Adjourned at 10:08 a.m.)

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CERTIFICATE OF COURT REPORTER

1
2 I, MELISSA BURDINE-RODOLFICH, Court Reporter
3 and Notary Public, in and for the County of
4 Harrison, State of Mississippi, hereby certify that
5 the foregoing pages, and including this page,
6 contain a true and correct copy of my stenotype
7 notes and/or electronic tape recording of the
8 public meeting witness, as taken by me at the time
9 and place heretofore stated, to the best of my
10 skill and ability.

11 I further certify that I am not in the employ
12 of, or related to, any counsel or party in this
13 matter, and have no interest, monetary or
14 otherwise, in the final outcome of the proceedings.

15 Witness my signature and seal, this the
16 _____ day of _____, 2023

17
18 /s/ Melissa Burdine-Rodolfich

19
20 Melissa Burdine-Rodolfich
21 My Commission Expires 4/28/24
22
23
24
25