Chairman Darin Topping called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. The following members, staff, and others were present:

**Members**
Jason Froeba, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Luiz Barbieri, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Dan Ellinor, FWC, Tallahassee, FL  
Erik Brroussard, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Rick Burris, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Scott Bannon, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL  
Darin Topping, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Christopher Mace, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Roy Crabtree, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL

**Staff**
James Ballard, GSMFC, Sport Fish/Aquatic Invasives Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Joe Ferrer, GSMFC Systems Administrator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ali Wilhelm, GSMFC, Sport Fish/Aquatic Invasives Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jeff Rester, GSMFC, SEAMAP Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Gregg Bray, GSMFC, FIN Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS  
Angela Rabideau, GSMFC, Accountant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Donna Bellais, GSMFC, ComFIN Survey Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**
Justin Esslinger, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Trevor Moncrief, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Lindsay Fullenkamp, NOAA, Silver Spring, MD  
Jill Hendon, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
Carly Somerset, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Andrew Petersen, Bluefin Data, Baton Rouge, LA  
Lance Robinson, TPWD, Austin, TX  
Carey Gelpi, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX  
Eric Hoffmayer, NOAA, Pascagoula, MS  
Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Dickinson, TX  
Read Hendon, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS

**Adoption of Agenda**
A motion to adopt the agenda was made by Luiz Barbieri and passed unanimously.
Approval of Minutes
A motion to approve the minutes for the March 14, 2018 meeting was made by Jason Froeba and passed with no opposition.

Overview of Year One of the Red Snapper Exempted Fishing Permits
Each state provided a brief overview of the first year of state management of the red snapper recreational fishing season under the new exempted fishing permits. Darin Topping stated that Texas had an allocation of 16% (241,245 lbs.) of the total Gulf of Mexico TAC and their primary goal was to not go over their allocation. They maintained their 365 day season in state waters (out nine miles) and had an 82 day federal season starting on June 1st and ending August 21st. Their quota monitoring was carried out by utilizing their field staff to do weekly creel surveys and those surveys were proved to the scientific staff and estimates were generated on a biweekly basis. At the end of their federal season they had collected approximately 160,000 lbs. and they have no intentions to reopen a federal season because they are anticipating their state water season will collect the majority of the remainder of their allocation. For next year, they will be conducting public scoping meetings to get input from the recreational community on any possible changes for the 2019 season. Luiz Barbieri reported that Florida had a 40 day recreational red snapper season that started on June 11th and ran through July. Florida received an allocation of about 42% of the total Gulf of Mexico TAC (~1.8 million lbs.). They used MRIP and the Gulf Reef Fish Survey to assess catch and effort data to monitor their quota. Because the final numbers are not available from wave 4 of MRIP, they have not been able to generate their final season estimates yet, but they harvested about 1.1 million lbs. in June. Erik Broussard stated that Mississippi’s season opened on May 25th and ran through July 9th, then there was a two week mid-season closure to assess their catch data which is all collected through their Tails n’ Scales program and to generate new harvest projection. The season reopened on July 23rd and ran through August 24th. The season was also reopened on Labor Day weekend and the weekend of September 14th-16th to utilize the rest of the allocation. The total recreational allocation for Mississippi was 135,149 lbs. and the estimated recreational harvest was 128,678 lbs. Jason Froeba reported that Louisiana’s recreational allocation was 743,000 lbs. and they planned on using LA Creel to monitor their harvest. The season was opened on May 25th and was open seven days a week until July 13th when it switched to weekends only. By August 12th the total harvest was 737,000 lbs. and the season was closed. Scott Bannon stated that in Alabama they anticipated having a 47 day (weekend only) recreational red snapper season that would start on June 1st and run through Labor Day. However, their harvest effort was double historical estimates at about 40,000 lbs. per day which forced them to close the season at the end of July (28 day season total). They used Snapper Check to monitor their harvest data which was critical, because if they would have just relied on historical catch and run their season for their original 47 days, they would have greatly exceeded the ACL. Alabama’s total allocation was 984,291 lbs. and their total harvest was about 986,298 lbs. For future years, they are looking at ways to increase the reporting rates in their Snapper Check program.

Presentation on the Draft Cobia Profile
Steve VanderKooy provide a presentation on the draft Cobia Profile. Given the fact that this is only a profile and does not provide management recommendations, the TCC will provide the final approval of the document following their final review. Steve pointed out that the document is not ready for the committee to review now, but it will be distributed to the TCC for their final review in about 30 days. In his presentation Steve briefly outlined the biology of cobia including their
distribution, the commercial and recreational fishery, the population status, their aquaculture potential, as well as the future research needs for the cobia population in the Gulf of Mexico that are outlined in the draft profile. Steve stated that he will distribute the draft profile to the committee as soon as it is ready for a 30-45 day review.

**Subcommittee Reports**

**Data Management**

Justin Esslinger reported that Richard Cody gave a presentation on the results of the transition to the Fishing Effort Survey (FES). This mail survey replaces the old Random Digit Dial telephone survey for estimating effort of inshore and private boat modes. Cody presented detailed results for several important management species in the Gulf of Mexico and in general the new FES calibrated estimates average two to three times more than previous Coastal Household Telephone Survey estimates. Impacts on stock assessments and the management advice produced has yet to be determined for specific species but FES calibrated estimates will be used for future benchmark assessments.

The committee discussed the potential impact of the proposed federal for-hire electronic logbook program on data collection efforts for state permitted vessels. If all federally permitted charter vessels are mandated to report through the SEFHIER process, they still need methods for sampling state permitted vessels. Currently state permitted vessels are sampled with the MRIP For-Hire Telephone Survey, LA Creel or TPWD survey. At this time no states suggested an alternative method or preference for collecting data from state permitted vessels but recognized appropriate sampling methods would be important for this subset of the for-hire fishery.

Justin stated that Dave Donaldson informed the subcommittee on several potential funding opportunities that could benefit monitoring data collection activities. Biological Sampling and Headboat port sampling have received funding through 2020. The Interjurisdictional Fishery Program may potentially receive increased funding in 2019 and beyond. This will fully fund the IJF program and may allow us to spend some additional money on monitoring activities. FY2019 Senate budget has an increase in the FIN line items. This would cover multiple FIN regions but it’s possible the GulfFIN allocation might increase by a small amount. NRDA is interested in doing a barotrauma study that has several components with monitoring being a large component of that research. It would be essential to develop the study to quantify how the resource is recovering from the oil disaster but if obtained these funds would support research and monitoring for up to 10 years.

Dave Gloeckner informed the subcommittee that Mike Travis with NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office has reiterated the need for GulfFIN to collect and provide a database that identifies all unique commercial vessels operating in the Gulf of Mexico. GulfFIN has developed a database structure with all the necessary data elements but states have had difficulty providing data for a variety of reasons. GulfFIN has asked if Mr. Travis could provide a white paper that details the need for these data and how they are intended to be used to help the states in their efforts to obtain and provide these critical data.
The subcommittee also reviewed the 2017 commercial landings data from their respective state. No major problems were identified but state representatives will make necessary corrections to the 2017 data and re-submit to GSMFC to correct minor coding problems.

Luiz Barbieri made a motion to accept the report as presented, and it passed unanimously.

Crab

Rick Burris stated that the Crab Subcommittee covered a number of topics which were all directly related to current and future regional stock assessments. FWC presented ongoing work on fecundity and seasonality of blue crab spawning in Florida waters and a larval dispersal model exploring the transport of various local populations based on the prevailing current data available from NOAA. The results suggest that Florida crabs may provide larvae mostly back to Florida and up the east coast. The results also suggest that the population breaks used in the regional assessment (GDAR02) may have more support. Meg Oshima (GCRL) developed a surplus production model using the existing FID from each state and found similar results to GDAR02 with an apparent stock break somewhere along the Florida Panhandle. The Western Gulf (AL-TX) seemed to show declining abundance indices while the Eastern Gulf (FL) had relatively stable abundances. This may be a model available for the next assessment.

Luis Hurtado provided some preliminary genetics work looking at crabs from Texas, the Florida Panhandle and the Chesapeake. His results indicate that the previous approach using neutral markers didn’t provide the resolution necessary to determine a single or multiple stock. Using more selective markers, some east west stock break was found. Additional samples are needed from all of the states in the north central Gulf to determine the heterogeneity of the population and where a population break may actually exist.

Zachary Darnell (GCRL) updated the group on the 18,000 tags that have been released on female blue crabs over the past couple of years. Tag returns are providing some insight into adult movements. It was hoped that commercial shrimpers could provide additional info on the potential offshore crab population but there are definitely low returns coming from the shrimp fishery Gulf-wide. It is hoped that more outreach could improve the responsiveness of this critical sector.

Rick Burris presented results of both the recreational crab trap fishing survey and the commercial fishery terrapin interaction app. Both are preliminary but will provide useful data in the future to address both recreational and commercial effort as well as hotspots for potential terrapin research.

The subcommittee will discuss data needs for various assessment model options and any additional items that might need to be worked on in advance of the next benchmark assessment. The agenda for the March meeting will include more of the tools and parameters needed for a future assessment.

Ryan Gandy was elected Chair.

A motion to accept the report was moved by Scott Bannon, and passed without opposition.
Jill Hendon reported that Jeff Rester provided the administrative report to the subcommittee. To date for 2018 spring plankton, summer trawl, bottom longline, vertical longline, reef fish video, and the fall plankton surveys have been completed by all participating states. Fall trawl is still in progress with the Mississippi and Alabama components being complete, Florida is currently sampling and Louisiana will conduct their survey at the beginning of November. The high number of tropical systems this fall has affected the number of sea days that fall trawl will be able to conduct; however, the final effect of these on the allocated stations will not be known until the SEAMAP partners complete their portions of the survey. The high number of tropical systems also raised the question of how their paths affect sampling efforts; especially for surveys that conduct work immediately prior to or immediately post the storm’s passage. This seems to be of greatest concern for plankton as these samples are highly dependent on the state of the water column and water movements. NOAA noticed a low plankton volume from an AL plankton survey that was conducted one day after the passing of Tropical Storm Gordon. The subcommittee asked the NOAA plankton lead and the SEAMAP plankton workgroup to address this concern and set up some guidelines for the future.

Jill stated that the subcommittee has been trying to implement a habitat mapping component for quite a while. The habitat information would be beneficial to correlate with the catch data. Florida has been conducting some habitat mapping work through NFWF funding and has developed a standardized protocol for its implementation. The subcommittee members are currently reviewing this protocol to determine its utility across the Gulf and are discussing the purchase of a side scan sonar with bathymetric package that could be shared by the states. The scanning would be conducted on existing surveys during down times. They hope to set up a workgroup to flesh out the details of this proposed addition. Also, NOAA is currently deploying a GoPro camera on all CTD deployments during their surveys which allows for a quick snapshot of the bottom type at that deployment point. If this was conducted by the states at all stations on all surveys the subcommittee would have an expansive understanding of the point habitat types across the Gulf. As the cost for this employment is minimal, SEAMAP partners hope to implement this on the state surveys for 2019.

The subcommittee has decided to conduct a small pilot study to evaluate the effectiveness of a new vertical line gear. The gear used during the current vertical longline study was developed to target red snapper, and accordingly 95% of the catch is red snapper. The pilot study was developed by the subcommittee and will be implemented by the Mississippi group. It includes minimizing the weight of the backbone and gangion monofilament, as well as shifting the mainline to spectra line. It also implements fewer gangions per backbone (from 10 to 4) and employs a smaller hook size replacing the 15/0 from the SEAMAP protocol with a 2/0. Video and a depletion fishing methodology will also be used to see how effective the new gear is at sampling all species present. These changes will hopefully result in more collections of triggerfish and grouper which would increase the value of the survey.

The subcommittee met in July with all three SEAMAP Components (Caribbean, Atlantic, and Gulf). At that meeting, they discussed the budget for FY19 and are planning on level funding.

Ted Switzer was reelected as Chair, and Jill Hendon was reelected as Vice Chair.
Luiz Barbieri made a motion to accept the report as presented, and it passed unanimously.

**State/Federal Reports**

Darin Topping stated that written reports were provided to the TCC members prior to the meeting for their review and if there is no objections, by acclamation he would like to have them placed in the record and forgo reading them into the record. The committee had no objections. To see the full reports that were provided to the TCC, please see the minutes from the Commission Business Meeting held on Thursday, October 18, 2019.

**Election of Officers**

Darin Topping was reelected as Chair, and Beverly Sauls was reelected as Vice Chair.

*There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 2:47pm*