

## **Outreach and Education Technical Committee Report**

May 10, 2018  
8:30 AM – 3:00 PM  
Tampa, FL

### Communications Analytics

Staff provided an overview of Gulf Council communications analytics noting that overall, communications are following a steady upward trend. However, staff noted downward trends in website access to the newsletter. The Committee suggested that potentially, readers are viewing the PDF of the newsletter sent through Constant Contact which may drive down website hits. It was also mentioned that the newsletter is a useful summation of what is going on with the Council. It was noted that agency and organizational personnel, rather than anglers, may be the appropriate target audience of the newsletter.

Staff also noted a downward trend in the number of users and sessions on the Council's regulations app. It was suggested that the current app was outdated and that another app, Fish Rules, was becoming the industry standard and Gulf Council regulations app. users may be transitioning to that platform.

### Gulf Council's Policy on the Use of Venting Tools and Descending Devices

Staff summarized the development of the Council's new Policy on the Use of Venting Tools and Descending Devices. Staff has requested analysis from the Science Center based on a Council motion regarding, discards in numbers of fish to better understand the magnitude of the issue. The hope is that this information will emphasize the need to use descending devices and venting tools and motivate action, as the average angler may not aware of the breadth of this issue. It was mentioned that there is not comprehensive data on the size of the fish released, but Florida FWC staff noted that information is beginning to be collected.

The Committee reviewed and updated the list of efforts each agency is already making to encourage the use of venting and descending tools. The conclusions that arose from the discussion are as follows:

- Many agencies are working on their own efforts to promote the proper use of descending devices and venting tools.
- There are regional differences across the Gulf that affect barotrauma and the need and success of venting/descending. Communications efforts do need to be tailored to these specific differences.
- Current communications materials all seem geared towards the private sector and there is a need to ensure that all sectors are addressed. The different sectors prosecute the fishery differently and may prefer different barotrauma mitigation measures, so different messages may need to be directed to each of the sectors.

- Venting and descending tools are important components of survival, but handling time, dehooking, and other factors also contribute to survival upon release. Outreach should include a holistic approach to techniques that will minimize discard mortality.
- Numerous studies have been conducted recently to gauge angler awareness and usage of barotrauma mitigation devices. It's been found that social norms are a driving force to motivate the use of descending devices. It's also been shown that people have good attitudes towards the use of barotrauma mitigation, but awareness of the tools is low and many anglers don't know how to use the gear properly.

Then, the committee discussed the Council's Outreach plan as it relates to the use of venting tools and descending devices policy. It was suggested that rather than create redundant materials, the Gulf Council should take the lead in displaying the Gulf-wide impact of discards and document current research. Additionally, the Council should take on the role of being the central voice that coordinates regional partners to create a unified approach. The Council should also curate partners' outreach materials across the region in a "best fishing practices" webpage.

Finally, the Committee discussed the idea that the outreach plan should not simply focus on communications. The Council should serve as the lead agency responsible for promoting a holistic approach to ensure the goals of the policy are realized. The greater *action plan* should aim to increase stock productivity and make more fish available to fishermen. This plan should incorporate the following:

- Communications that promote the wide-spread, proper use of venting and descending tools.
- Collection of data on tool usage and the impact it has on dead discards.
- Incorporation of results into stock assessments.
- Promotion of the development of new tools and techniques to increase survivability upon release.

The Committee made the following motions:

**Motion:** To recommend that the Council take responsibility as the Gulf coordinating body for reducing discard mortality through best handling practice issues. Further, that the O& E Technical Committee be charged with further development of the Outreach Plan in concert with the states, organizations, and other bodies.

Motion carried with no opposition.

**Motion:** To recommend the Council instigate a meeting of scientists, managers, and stakeholders to develop an action plan that includes information dissemination and

science and monitoring needs that ensure the policy purpose and objectives are both measurable and successful.

Motion carried with no opposition.

#### Review of Anecdotal Data Collection Tool

Staff presented the Committee with a draft of a tool that will be used to collect information from fishermen about what is happening on the water. The tool does not aim to collect trip level data, but is looking for new trends or anomalies that are occurring with specific fish stocks managed by the Gulf Council. The tool would be deployed prior to stock assessments. The information collected would be summarized and reported to the assessment team prior to each stock assessment. This information is intended to augment the role of a fishery observer by providing leading indicators of stock performance, or to ground truth trends apparent in indices of abundance. The information may also be presented to the Council's SSC when it reviews assessment results.

The Committee liked the tool and encouraged its use. The committee made recommendations on how to modify the tool to ensure the most important information is captured. The Committee also recommended that this tool be deployed widely to anyone who wants to provide responses. It was also recommended that the tool be opened for a finite time period before each assessment.

#### Transition to Fish Rules app and away from paper regulations

Staff reported that they are transitioning away from paper regulations and working towards switching from the current regulations app. to Fish Rules. The Committee supported the move to Fish Rules because it is considered the "household name" of regulations apps. It was mentioned that this was a great example of the Council listening to what its constituents want and responding by giving them information in the ways they prefer.

The Committee expressed support for a transition away from printed regulations as long as it's made clear that anglers can request a paper copy be printed and sent if they don't have access to a computer or smartphone.

#### Gray Snapper SEDAR Infographic Review

The Committee reviewed an infographic designed by staff at the Southeast Fishery Science Center that depicts the science and life history of gray snapper. This infographic is intended to serve as a template for future species upon completion of future assessment. The Committee made some minor recommendations on how to improve the infographic for fishermen.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 PM.

Meeting Attendees:

**Technical Committee Members**

Kim Amendola  
Bill Balboa (webinar)  
Marcus Drymon  
Julie Falgout  
Bob Gill  
Rebecca Hillebrandt  
Shelly Krueger (Chair)  
David Rainer  
Melissa Scallan (webinar)  
Zach Thomas

**Members of the Public**

Rebecca Burton  
Angela Collins  
Ken Haddad  
Chad Hanson  
Dylan Hubbard  
Sean Meehan  
Beverly Sauls  
Betty Staugler  
Dorothy Zimmerman