GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Key West Marriott Beachside Hotel

Key West, Florida

June 20, 2018

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Phil Dyskow ................................................. Florida
Doug Boyd .................................................... Texas
Robin Riechers ............................................. Texas
Bob Shipp .................................................... Texas
Greg Stunz .................................................. Texas
Ed Swindell (via webinar) ................................. Louisiana
LT Mark Zanowicz ......................................... USCG

NON-VOTING MEMBERS

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Leann Bosarge ................................................. Mississippi
Glenn Constant ................................................ USFWS
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Dale Diaz ....................................................... Mississippi
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PAGE 18: Motion that staff work with GSMFC to develop a meeting of scientists, agency personnel, 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. The motion carried on page 19.

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The Outreach and Education Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council convened at the Key West Marriott Beachside Hotel, Key West, Florida, Wednesday morning, June 20, 2018, and was called to order by Chairman Phil Dyskow.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA
APPROVAL OF MINUTES
ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS

CHAIRMAN PHIL DYSKOW: I would like to call this meeting of the Outreach and Education Committee to order. I am actually here under false colors. I am the Vice Chair of this committee. Ed Swindell is the Chair, and I am temporarily sitting in for him, although he is online participating with us by phone, and so, anytime he has a question or a comment, I hope he feels free to participate.

Also on this committee are Doug Boyd, Robin Riechers, Bob Shipp, Greg Stunz, and Lieutenant Zanowicz. Our council coordinator is Emily Muehlstein, and she does most of the heavy lifting on this committee, and so you’ll be hearing a lot from her.

That said, the first item is to adopt the agenda. Hopefully you have that in front of you and you’re able to look at that, and I would like to ask for a motion to approve the agenda. Thank you. Is there a second? Doug Boyd seconds. Any discussion on the agenda, or any additions? If not, I don’t know if we need to bring it a vote or just approve it without objection, and so I think we just approve it.

The next item is to approve the minutes. Again, you have this in front of you, and are there any comments about the minutes, any additions, or do we have a motion to approve as-is?

MR. DOUG BOYD: So moved.

DR. GREG STUNZ: I will second it.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Okay. A second from Greg, and a motion from Doug Boyd. Any opposition? Seeing none, the motion passes. I am going to now pass on the agenda to Ms. Muehlstein, who will take us through the next item, which is the action guide.

MS. EMILY MUEHLSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Vice Chair. If you look at Tab O, Number 3, that is our action guide and next steps. At today’s committee, we have two major action items. The first one we’re going to be looking at is review of the council’s outreach plan on descending and venting policy, and so, if you
remember, in January, you asked to convene the Outreach and Education Technical Committee. We have convened that group, and they reviewed the draft of the plan, and they have made some recommendations about how we should move forward, and so we’ll take a look at the new draft plan and the recommendations from the technical committee and hopefully -- We’re looking for the council to provide some guidance to staff, if you concur with the direction that we’re going in, and provide us some information on the best path forward.

The next item is the second sort of major action item on our agenda today, and that is review of an anecdotal data collection tool, and so the council, a couple of meetings back, had asked staff to develop a tool that would collect information from fishermen about interesting trends or anomalies that they’re seeing in the behavior of the fish or the fish stocks in general, and so we have developed a draft of that tool. We have also come up with a mechanism through which we think we want to disseminate that tool and sort of the timing and who it’s going to go to, and so we will discuss that, and we would like your thoughts on that tool and on our proposed dissemination of the tool.

Next, we will go over our communications analytics. We typically only host the Outreach and Education Committee about once a year, and so we kind of tend to do this on an annual basis, and so we’ll just show you kind of a snapshot of how we’re doing analytics-wise with our council communications, and then we will move to a discussion about our transition from paper regulations to the Fish Rules app, and there is no action required. It’s just an update. Then we’ll conclude just by looking over sort of any extra stuff that’s in the report from the O&E Technical Committee. With that, I think we’re ready to move on.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: The first item on the agenda is the Outreach Plan for Descending Devices and Venting Tools.

REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL’S OUTREACH PLAN ON THE DESCENDING AND VENTING POLICY

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Vice Chair. We will bring that up really quickly, and I think the best way to review this new outreach plan, because it looks significantly different from the one that you all saw in January, is to sort of couch the conversation in the advice and the conversation that we had with our technical committee.
We spent a greater portion of the day discussing this, and this really was the major item that was on the technical committee’s roster when we decided to host that committee, and so what I would like to do is kind of go over the recommendations that I got from the committee and how we ended up where we are with our current proposal.

The two main things that the committee did when we met, the technical committee, was they first reviewed an updated list of the efforts that each agency is already making regarding descending and venting, and so it sounds like there is a lot of agencies that are already doing work on this, and we wanted to make sure that we kind of had a comprehensive list of what was happening, and so it looks like Bernie has brought that up.

We went through each state agency, and we also have representatives from the different Sea Grant agencies from across the coast, and then we did have some advocacy groups and some industry personnel that also attended that meeting and provided some information on the efforts that they are making for descending and venting devices to mitigate barotrauma.

Some of the conclusions that we got out of the committee when we did this exercise was we found that many of the agencies are already working on their own efforts to promote the proper use of descending devices and venting tools. We also found that there are numerous regional differences across the Gulf that affect barotrauma and the success of venting and descending and that communication efforts need to be tailored to the specific differences of the specific regions.

We also discovered that current communication materials all seemed geared to the private sector, and there was a discussion about the fact that there is a need to ensure that all sectors are addressed and not simply the private angling sector.

It was also mentioned that venting and descending tools are important components of survival, but there are other things that play into the survival of a released fish, including handling time, dehooking, and some other factors, including water temperature, that are a little bit harder to control, and so it was noted by the technical committee that the outreach should include a more holistic approach that includes techniques that would minimize discard mortality in general and not just focusing on the use of these release devices.

Then, finally, it was noted that there have already been numerous studies conducted across the Gulf that gauge angler
awareness and usage of barotrauma mitigation devices, and some of the results of those studies were that social norms are a driving force that motivate the use of descending devices, and it’s also been shown that people have really good attitudes towards the use of these devices, but maybe are lacking in awareness of the tools and the ability to use those tools, and, from an outreach perspective, that’s a great problem to have. If you don’t have an attitude problem and you just have an awareness and an aptitude problem, that’s an easier issue, I think, to tackle, in a lot of ways.

Moving on, the committee then discussed the outreach plan as it relates to the use of our new policy, and they decided that, rather than create redundant materials, since all of these other agencies are already doing things, the Gulf Council should really take the lead role in displaying the Gulf-wide impacts on discards and documenting current research that is happening on a Gulf-wide basis and that the council should take a role in being sort of the central voice that coordinates our regional partners to create a unified approach to outreaching the use of these devices. Then we would also sort of curate our partners’ outreach materials across the region.

Basically, the idea here, and you can see it in the proposed outreach plan, is that we would create a best fishing practices website, and the first part is that we would sort of present a Gulf-wide view of the discard issue and how large of an issue it can be, and that sort of relates to what is in our Other Business. We have these tables where we’re trying to sort of drill down how large of a problem the discards really are and what potential effect we can have on that if we all sort of start to culturally adopt the use of these tools.

I think the Gulf Council would like to take on the Gulf-wide perspective, and then what we would also do is, in that same best fishing practices page, we would house all of the regional information that is being completed by our partners. That way, we kind of avoid redundancy, but we still make sure that all of the information is there in sort of a comprehensive way.

The next thing that the committee discussed that made it into our outreach plan is the idea that the outreach plan should not simply focus on communications and that the council should actually serve as the lead agency responsible for promoting a holistic approach, to ensure that the goals of our policy are realized, meaning that the greater action plan should aim to increase stock productivity and to make more fish available to the fishermen.
Rather than just look at this as an outreach endeavor, it’s sort of a wider endeavor, where we’re not just trying to promote the use of our policy and awareness of our policy, but we’re actually trying to promote the behaviors and the end results that we’re hoping for a part of our policy, and so the idea was, if we ended up doing that, that we should incorporate communications that promote the widespread and proper use of venting.

We should also look into communication of the data on tool usage and the impact that it has on those dead discards and the incorporation of those results in a stock assessment, so that potentially we have downstream the ability to maybe have more harvestable fish, and we also — It was mentioned that maybe the council should start playing a role in a group that would promote the development of new tools and techniques to increase survivability. With that, Bernie, can you bring up our proposed outreach plan?

If you look at our outreach plan, it sort of highlights sort of the rationale that we’re using, and there are two main pillars of this plan. The first one is promoting the widespread awareness of the council’s policy by informing partner agencies and the media of our policy existence, and so there is a number of different mechanisms that we plan to use in order to sort of just promote the existence of the policy itself, but then the second pillar of this plan is promoting the actual use of these tools by serving as a unified voice that speaks across all of those fishing sectors and all of the regions in our Gulf, and so, with that, I think I will pause and take any feedback.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Greg.

DR. STUNZ: Emily, first, thanks for really — It looks like you guys have done a lot of work, and I appreciate that. I think the committee, and me, certainly did not want a policy that we just made and didn’t really move forward, and so this represents a great opportunity for engagement and outreach that I think a lot of people are behind, and so I appreciate everything you have done to move that forward.

I wanted to comment on what you mentioned about all the different studies and information that is out there, and you’re exactly right that there is a lot, and a lot of that is species and region-specific, because of the nature of the way that the fishery occurs and just the differences, obviously, among the region.
I think the council and the work that you’re doing on the council initiatives here could be sort of this warehouse, in a very meaningful and organized way, and collect that information, and maybe it’s by species or by region and served back out, because, right now, it’s at a lot of different places, but, also, I don’t think we want to get in the business of reinventing all of that, certainly.

A lot of really good stuff is out there by Sea Grant, a lot of good stuff in Florida, and, really, all of the states are producing things, and I think, by assembling that and putting it in one place, it would probably be the most useful way to go, and you kind of touched on that, but I just wanted to reiterate that I think that that’s a good approach, because, right now, it isn’t really collected in one area.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Thank you for that comment, Greg. I would like to underscore that. This was the first meeting of the Outreach and Education Committee that I attended, as a new council member, and I wasn’t impressed by the amount of material. I was overwhelmed by the amount of material in all five of the Gulf states, and somebody has to capture all of this in one location and be the leader, and we’re the entity that I feel can do that best, but we don’t need to create very much. It is all there. We just need to package it in such a way that people have universal access to it across the Gulf. Are there any questions on anything that Emily has covered so far? If not, please continue. Clay.

DR. CLAY PORCH: Thank you, Chair. I just wanted to reiterate, especially in light of the conversation we had yesterday, how important this kind of information would be. In stock assessments, we typically look on a Gulf-wide basis, and, when it comes to things like the potential effect of release mortality, we have a lot of scientific studies, where we suggest that, okay, we’ve shown that venting works, and we’ve shown that descender devices work, but what is always missing is a sort of broad-brush look at how these are actually being applied.

We know they work if they are used properly, but we don’t actually know what fraction of the fishermen are doing it right or doing it at all, and so this kind of thing could get us a much better picture.

For instance, we talked about red snapper, but we did have fishermen in the room that said that they thought that venting was generally fairly widely practiced, at least in their areas,
but they are only representing the areas where they actually fish, and, obviously, there’s only a handful of them, typically, in the room, and what they see may not be representative of the entire Gulf.

Something like this could get us a much better view of what are the standard practices across the Gulf, and that would help us decide how to adjust the release mortality rate, and, as we saw, that can be an important factor in an assessment and in these kind of analyses to decide whether you should or shouldn’t require the use of various devices.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Thank you, Clay, and you brought up an interesting point. We have tools, that have been developed by Sea Grant and others, to the extent that venting in particular is so thoroughly explained that anyone can utilize this that wants to, and the degree of utilization is what we want to increase, and so that’s why I think this leadership position for the council is so important, because the tools are there. The will to use the tools needs to be enhanced.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DOUG GREGORY: I think the opportunity, going forward, is to take a second look at the priorities of the research funding programs, like MARFIN and S-K and cooperative fishing, and make sure that the research to look into the effective of these be funded, when possible, and encourage researchers to do more of what they’re doing.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Madam Chair.

MS. LEANN BOSARGE: Kind of building on this conversation, I think this might be another area where it’s something that we’ve been talking about in the past and that we’re working on, Emily is, is that tool for a specific stock assessment that may be ongoing to try and involve more of the fishermen in the process, because, as Clay said, for physical space room and then for the monetary cost of actually having fishermen come to the meeting, there’s just a handful of them, usually, and, as Clay said, that particular gentleman may just be fishing in one area, but, as we work through that process and try and get a vetted list of fishermen that we would push out some questions to during the stock assessment process, which is a long process, and just try and get some feedback from them, and that may be one of those anecdotal questions where we could get some qualitative information from them, to see maybe how many of them do use venting tools and how often and what depth of water are you fishing in when you use it and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. That might be another good use for our upcoming data portals,
CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Thank you, Madam Chair. You bring up an excellent point. For something we have talked about so much, we have very little actual hard data to support our assumption that venting tools and other devices actually are creating a difference, and we need better tools, and, rather than get hung up in the weeds right now, what the effectiveness of the tools to reduce discard mortality is and how effective they are, but we know, intuitively, that they are effective at a level, but we don't know what that level is, but certainly can do no harm in increasing the utilization, and I think that, at this point, has got to be the goal, until we get this information and these numbers. It’s rare to have something that we have talked about so much that we still know so little about. Since Emily is staring at me, I guess that means she is -- I’m sorry. Did we have a question over here?

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: That is Mr. Peter Hood from the Southeast Regional Office.

MR. PETER HOOD: I was going to say that. I am Peter Hood with the Regional Office, but I just wanted to remind you, and I think you’ve got this in bits and pieces, but the Open Ocean Restoration Plan that is being developed right now has -- One of the projects that the fish team is working on is actually to do more -- It’s kind of this holistic approach to looking at descender devices, and our plan -- The way things are working right now, we will have a draft plan probably somewhere around the beginning of 2019, and a final plan a few months later, and then sometime next summer the plan should be in place, and it will support things like research and outreach and things like that, and we plan on coordinating with Emily, and so I just wanted to make sure that you knew about that.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Thank you. If there are no further questions, Emily, please continue.

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: Okay. Great. Thank you. The Outreach and Education Technical Committee did make two motions while they were discussing this outreach plan, and both of those motions seemed to speak to the conversation that we just had, and so I think the best thing is sort of we go one-by-one.

The first motion that the technical committee made was to recommend that the council take responsibility as the Gulf coordinating body for reducing discard mortality through best handling practice issues, and, 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. I think this motion speaks to the conversation we just had about the council serving sort of as that central voice.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Is there any discussion on this motion? Greg.

DR. STUNZ: I don’t necessarily disagree with this at all. I guess the question is does the council have the capacity do that? I mean, I certainly think that that would be a good idea, and I would be willing to make a motion as such, but I don’t want to -- In light of workload and that kind of thing, but it does seem appropriate.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: I would defer that question to Emily, with the caveat that the very people that are producing these materials and developing them are the ones that passed this motion without opposition. Everyone that attended this meeting is looking for a coordinating body to communicate this message in a consistent and uniform way, and so I will now defer that question to Emily.

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: I think it’s reflected in the draft outreach plan that is brought before you today. I do think that, especially if we sort of make this sort of a web-based tool right now, this is absolutely something that we can start to do, and that would be through hosting sort of a Gulf-wide perspective, like I outlined, and then making sure that we have all of our partner materials.

As Mr. Dyskow mentioned, the committee all seemed pretty eager to have somebody take on that role as the lead, and I think we can produce some tools and some outputs that would certainly fulfill the needs for this.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Greg.

DR. STUNZ: Emily, I would be prepared to make a motion, if needed. The question is I want to make sure that I make the motion that is most appropriate for what you are envisioning, but does that motion capture that?

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: I think potentially the best thing that we can do is we’ll look at the second motion and then, in relationship to the outreach plan that we have presented, I think maybe -- Because I feel like that outreach plan kind of speaks to this, and the best thing we can do is look at that outreach plan and just bless that as a council to move forward with that, and so I think, rather than make an independent motion, maybe -- What I
am trying to do with that outreach plan is speak to the motion that was made.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Any further discussion? Greg, was that a motion, or was that just a point of discussion?

DR. STUNZ: Well, at this -- I think it’s a point of discussion at this point, and then I will make a motion related to that regarding the plan when we’re finished.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Thank you.

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: Okay, and so then I think we can move on to the second motion that was made by the panel, which was to recommend that the council instigate a meeting of scientists, managers, and stakeholders to develop an action plan that includes information dissemination and the science and monitoring needs that ensure the policy, purpose, and objective are both measurable and successful.

This motion is somewhat related to our outreach plan, but it also goes a little bit further, and so there was a long discussion by the technical committee regarding the idea that maybe communications are not the only thing that we need to accomplish here, and so I think the idea is that we not only just promote the use of these tools, but that we also sort of work with some of our partner agencies and some of the appropriate persons throughout the Gulf to make sure that there is some scientific follow-up that will study the prevalence of the use of these tools and to also ensure that it makes its way into the stock assessment, so that we have that measurable outcome that we’re looking for as a council.

This isn’t written directly into the outreach plan, because I figured that we could have some discussion on this. I have spoken offline with Dave Donaldson of the Gulf States, and it sounds like maybe the best way to do this is to host a general session during one of the Gulf States meetings so that we can invite people that are more than just the communicators.

In other words, this motion is almost outside of the breadth of what just pure communications personnel can do. This would involve some scientists and some strategic thinking about, Gulf-wide, what we need in order to go from the promotion of the use of these tools into the incorporation of some meaningful information into an assessment, and I think that does go beyond just the communications personnel around the Gulf, and so I will stop there, with that motion on the board.
CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Mr. Director. I can still call you that.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY: For two days, yes. I brought this up at the technical committee, but this goes beyond what the council typically does, but I think this concept fits perfectly with what a group called the Fisheries Forum does, and they are still around.

We also don’t have a budget for this sort of thing, but I know, if we go to the Fisheries Forum and ask them to do something like that, that would really be a national forum and not just the Gulf of Mexico. They will want some funding, and so I would think -- Our next five-year grant begins in 2020, and we could try to build something into that grant to do this.

We don’t have the funds in our current grant earmarked to do anything like this, but I think the Fisheries Forum type of concept would be ideal for this, and they have addressed a number of issues on behalf of the councils over the years, and they have even done special meetings for councils over the years, particularly the Mid-Atlantic and the New England Council.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Robin.

MR. ROBIN RIECHERS: Kind of to that point, but also stepping back one possible location for finding some of this information, and I will ask you, Emily, but the Open Ocean group, if they are going to do this and publish it in a draft restoration plan, are certainly going to address some of those issues and get a lot of input across the Gulf on those issues, as well as even beyond the Gulf.

I don’t want to reinvent what they’re already going to do, from a process standpoint. I would rather kind of tag on to that, and I will let you speak to that, and then, if I need a follow-up, and I think I want to follow-up the conversation about where the meeting may be most appropriate.

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: I certainly agree. I want to avoid redundancy in any capacity we can, and I guess maybe what that would mean is we would have a larger seat at the table when it comes to working with the Regional Office and sort of what they’re looking for in that Open Ocean plan, and I would be fully comfortable with sort of substituting this idea with kind of joining in on the effort that’s already being done, if that’s the most appropriate path forward.
MR. RIECHERS: I guess I will now follow-up to Doug. First of all, I am -- Peter, I’m a little -- Unfortunately, you moved the timetable on the Open Ocean draft restoration plan, and that’s the first I’ve heard, and I thought we were going to get one in the fall, but is yours a separate one, or is it the first one that is coming out? Do you know?

MR. HOOD: I want to be very careful, because I don’t want to -- I am a member of a team, and I’m just not exactly sure what all is going on, but I did, today, ask for sort of what is the timeline for our fish project, and that’s what I related. There will be a draft ready sometime in probably next January. We are working on the draft right now. Glenn may have some information on that, too.

MR. GLENN CONSTANT: Open Ocean TIG is going to put out two separate draft restoration plans. One is going to be those projects led by the Department of Interior, which is Gulf sturgeon and birds. Everything else, including this fish and water column invertebrates work, which is the pot of money that the descender device project comes into, is going to be led by NOAA in a separate part of that plan, and so around January, but, to your point about connecting to them, I think there is a strong interest in not having redundancy and a strong interest in having the council, where appropriate, lead that effort, and so I think some more discussion in the interim, between the next meeting, might be in order, and I spoke to James Rinehart briefly via email communication, and he is interested in finding the right way to get you more involved in that, and we share the council’s interest in eliminating redundancy and getting the right kind of data.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: I would be remiss if I didn’t point out that many of the committee members recognized the difficulty in their second motion, the one we’re talking about now, and the key point that we want to preserve, even if the actual steps we take are different, is we want to make sure that this policy is communicated, which is Motion 1, but also that it is measurable, the objectives are measurable, and successful, and so, how we do that, I think there was a degree of flexibility, but there was a concern that if we don’t do that that we’re missing the important purpose of this entire process. Robin.

MR. RIECHERS: If I can follow-up to the conversation we’ve been having and going back to maybe the appropriate place here, I guess the only thing I will say is, at least from my perspective, I think suggesting that it go to the Fisheries
Forum, while that would create a national conversation, and I am not against a national conversation about this issue, I think, going back to our notion about trying to progress this along, as opposed to kind of just basically talking about it in our separate silos in each state and each organization doing what they’re doing -- All of that is good, and it’s appropriate that each group would do that, but, if we’re really going to try to get a handle on what is happening in the Gulf, I think Gulf States may be the more -- It may be both quicker and a more appropriate venue for the local discussion of this. Again, I am not opposed to the Fisheries Forum, but I think our dollars and effort would be spent a little closer to home, and it might help us out a little bit more.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Dave.

MR. DAVE DONALDSON: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Robin, I can kind of see it as a two-step process, where we have a -- In talking with Emily, we were looking to do something at our next March commission meeting, which will be in Louisiana, and then, following up, in the longer term, doing a Fisheries Forum, because I think that might be a good national discussion, but, to kind of kick it off with the commission and then go from there, based on those discussions.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Thank you. Are there any other questions? If not, I will turn it back over to Emily.

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. It looks like, sort of based on our agenda, really the only thing that I am looking for from you guys is approval of the policy that we put before you, or the outreach plan that we put before you, and, again, that sort of speaks to the first motion, which would promote the council’s policy and the use of these devices. I have heard some guidance about sort of the second motion from the technical committee, and I don’t know if we need a motion or not.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Well, I think -- Thank you, Emily. I think it would be appropriate for us to consider adopting our first motion, which simply states that the council will take the coordinating responsibility for all of these materials that a lot of people have spent much time and effort developing, so that those tools are available throughout the Gulf region.

The second motion, and, again, I will preface it by saying that many of the committee members were concerned that that would get swept under the rug, and what they want to make sure is that we have a process whereby we can measure the results of the
increased participation in decreasing releasing mortality through venting tools and descending devices.

I think, number one, if someone is of the opinion, we could simply initiate a motion to adopt that. The second motion, I think we have a bigger challenge, and it might be necessary to come up with a substitute motion to determine the next steps going forward. Greg.

DR. STUNZ: If the committee so feels, I am happy to make that first motion, if Emily would help me craft it just a little bit. I move to -- Now I’m confused of exactly what you want this motion to say.

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: I think you want to adopt the outreach plan, which sort of outlines that we will be taking on that central voice, and so that’s the first one. We can adopt that plan, and then we know that we’re in accordance with this first motion from the technical committee, and that seems to follow the wisdom of the committee’s discussion so far.

DR. STUNZ: I move that we adopt the outreach plan policy on the use of venting tools and descending devices.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: We have a motion. Do we have a second? Robin, were you seconding it? We have a motion and a second. Is there any discussion regarding this? Hearing none, I guess the next step is a vote, and is anyone opposed? Hearing no opposition, the motion passes. Emily, I am turning it back over to you. Robin.

MR. RIECHERS: I think Emily had just suggested that we now try to work with the second motion, and I am going to let them get this first one out, but I think, at least from my perspective, I would move that staff work with Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission to develop a meeting of scientists, managers, and stakeholders to develop an action plan that includes information dissemination and science and monitoring needs. You could actually take that whole section there. Go ahead and take it all the way.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Thank you, Robin. That is in the form of a motion, and so, as soon as that is crafted and we can read it, the next step will be to look for a second. Again, while that’s going up on the board, what the committee really wanted was to make sure we had something that was going to allow us to measure our success or failure, or measure our results, and let’s put it that way, and that’s what this is intended to do. If that is
your motion -- Go ahead, Robin.

MR. RIECHERS: Well, I think the question here is who is going to work to -- Just to ask staff or to direct staff to work with or direct the council to work with.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Any other changes, Robin? Is that your motion? We have a second from Doug Boyd. Do we have any discussion?

MR. ED SWINDELL: What is meant in this motion as the managers?

MR. RIECHERS: I will try to answer. I wasn’t involved in the meeting that created the motion, and so I will let someone who was there correct me if I’m wrong, but I believe what they would be referring to is state fisheries managers, state fisheries staff, and it could also apply to managers at the commission level who might be in the purpose of disseminating this.

Frankly, other outreach and education kinds of managers, including Sea Grant, et cetera, and I think it’s anyone who could be considered a person who is in the normal contact with the groups who you would be trying to disseminate this to, and so it’s a broad term as it’s used here, but certainly fisheries organizations probably are kind of at the top of that heap, but there is a host of others who could be part of that. Emily.

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: Well, and I suspect -- Mr. Swindell, for clarification, if you would like, we could probably switch that term with “agency personnel”, because that’s sort of another general, broad brush.

MR. SWINDELL: I don’t know that we need to change it, but I was just wondering just what was envisioned as managers. I have no problem with it. I think it’s broad enough that it will include almost anybody that you want to include from those organizations, and so I would support the motion. I know I can’t vote on it, but I do support it. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: All right. We have a motion proposed and a second. We’ve had discussion. Is there any opposition to this motion? Seeing none, this motion passes. Emily, I am passing it back to you.

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: I suppose, for this agenda item then today, the only remaining question I have is -- It sounds like, based on the discussion, that we’re also encouraged to work with the Open Ocean TIG folks, and I don’t know if that’s going to be
something that we can incorporate into this Gulf States or if it’s something that we would do separately, but I guess it just -- I guess I would like to mention that, since we had that conversation, that I will certainly entertain a greater relationship in that arena, and we can always talk about that down the line, once we kind of initiate conversation. Otherwise, I am done with that action item, and I guess I would ask the committee if they are as well.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Any comments regarding that? If not, we have a few other items on the agenda, Emily, that are still in your court.

REVIEW OF ANECDOTAL DATA COLLECTION TOOL

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: Okay. I will take them. Bernie, if you can go ahead and bring up our draft anecdotal data collection tool, and then we can look at what this is. Just a little background on this tool. We have been back and forth in conversations about creating some sort of data collection portal or tool that can gather information from fishermen about what is happening on the water.

In the conversations that we’ve had, it’s pretty clear that we are not looking for trip-level data. I don’t really want to know how many fish you’ve caught and how big they were each time, but what we’re more looking for is information on sort of anomalous situations that are happening, like I’m seeing this weird trend that is not always happening, and we’re looking for kind of general awareness information from our anglers, knowing that that information is not going to be quantitative in nature, but it’s going to be more qualitative.

The idea that we came up with was that this tool and the information that we collect would somehow then be incorporated either into the stock assessments directly or basically be presented to the stock assessment scientists so that they’re aware, in case there is anything that comes up and they’re like what are these trends in data and what is happening, and they can kind of groundtruth what they are seeing in the scientific data with the information that we’re getting from our fishermen.

We have created this tool in order to hopefully collect this kind of information, and I know there is a PDF of it in the briefing book, if that’s easier, because I don’t know if we need the live version.

The idea is, and what we sort of discussed based on those
conversations, and I talked to some of the stock assessment scientists and our stock assessment coordinator at our office, is maybe the best way to approach this tool is to disseminate this tool to kind of the general public before we have a stock assessment that is on the roster.

In other words, let’s use yellowtail as an example. If we know we have a yellowtail stock assessment coming up, we will present this tool, and we will sort of push it out in our normal dissemination channels, and we will say, hey, we’re about to do a stock assessment on yellowtail and let us know if there is anything going on with yellowtail that you know of, and so, hopefully, those fishermen will come back and they will give us some of that information.

We will then sort of compile all that information, like we do with our public comments that we hear, and we will present that information to the stock assessment panel at their data workshop, and so, right now, at the data workshop, the stock assessment folks invite the fishermen to sort of serve as the liaison to kind of groundtruth any trends in data or anything that’s happening, and so this might be a way for us to incorporate this qualitative data into the stock assessment process, so that the scientists that are doing that assessment will then be able to kind of groundtruth what is happening.

Bernie just brought up a PDF of the tool, and it’s called Something is Fishy, and so it will be Something is Fishy with, and that would be whatever stock we’re going to try and collect that data on at the time, and, if you can scroll down, Bernie, it gives a brief description of what kind of data that we’re looking for. We are not looking for that trip-level data, and we talked a lot about what kind of information that we wanted to collect from our anglers.

We are asking for their email address and their name and their association with the fishery, and we based these categories sort of off just the general categories that we use at the council level, and then we didn’t want to collect too much data or information on the fishermen. We didn’t want to make that barrier to submitting information too high, and so we’ve sort of settled on this, and then, if you scroll down, we’ll start to collect then that species information, or that information, and the first thing you will see is Item 5, which is a certification that the information you provide, or you are about to provide, is accurate to the best of your knowledge.

I know that there is some conversation about whether fishermen
would report one direction or another, hoping that it’s going to influence an assessment, and so we’ve added this in there, and I think the technical committee was pretty supportive of having that there, and then, simply, it’s to describe your observation, and, again, I think, when you say describe your observation, that’s a way to really make it clear that we’re looking for just sort of a qualitative type of information that we can then summarize and present to the panel. Then, if you scroll down, Bernie, I believe that’s all we’re asking for, and so it’s pretty simple.

Then there is the general location. The other thing that we’ve done here is went back and forth on whether or not we just wanted state level or if we wanted regional or what we wanted to do, and what we settled on, sort of as a staff, when I kind of talked to some of the SEDAR staff as well, is that the best thing that we can do is use the same quadrants that we use in our -- I believe these are from the shrimp data quadrants. That might be the most useful way for us to collect that information about where these observations are happening.

Then you can choose your location, and it’s a very general quadrant of where you are fishing, and we also have the ability to upload photographs, if that is something that is valuable, and then this follow-up is this contact piece, and that is please let us know if we may contact you regarding your submission, and so, in other words, if we get a submission and it is something that is of interest to either the scientists or the managers, we will have permission to follow-up with that angler regarding what they are seeing, and so I think that that might be a valuable tool both in gathering more information and also in building our relationships with our anglers.

There is the tool and a little bit of an overview about how we propose that we should use it, and I was just hoping for some feedback from you all on the tool itself and also on how we plan to sort of push it out, and there is the live tool.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Greg.

DR. STUNZ: Emily, I think this is great. This is good. Just as an example, the cobia discussion we’ve just been having, and that’s kind of stemming from something, and that sort of happened organically, and, obviously, we didn’t have this in place to do that.

I think about things like the gray snapper discussion that we can have and all the nuances with that, and that would be ways
to generate more information, and so I think it’s a good idea, 
and I would definitely say test it and see how it goes. I am a 
little bit concerned that it might flood your email box, and so 
that’s, obviously -- I guess you would just kind of have to see, 
because I could see where this could really turn into -- They’ve 
got to go through some steps in here, and I think that’s good, 
and so that curbs just somebody like they might post on the 
webpage or something. Anyway, I support this.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Robin.

MR. RIECHERS: I support it as well, and I think it’s well done. 
I think the difficulty, having worn a hat like this before, 
where we take qualitative information on surveys and then trying 
to actually turn it into some useful information, either by 
summarizing it in some way or trying to see how many people have 
done that through time, using key words, algorithms, which are 
now available -- The good news is they are now available out 
there with different software packages that you can do, but I 
think that’s the real difficulty.

You are getting a lot of information, and it’s qualitative in 
nature, and how you turn it into something that is truly useful 
to management, and, also, because that’s the part where there is 
an expectation that you’re going to use it somehow, when the 
people deliver it to you, and then, if you don’t meet on that 
expectation somewhere down the road -- You’re building a certain 
amount of trust there, but it can go away quickly if you don’t 
use it in some way, and so I think that’s going to be the 
difficult part. It’s certainly worth giving it a shot and 
seeing how it works.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Paul.

DR. PAUL MICKLE: Thank you, Mr. Chair, for recognizing me. I’m 
not on the committee, but I think it’s a wonderful thing, and I 
do want to mention that my wheels are spinning now about how 
useful this can actually be, and the SEDAR process invites 
fishermen, both commercial and recreational, to the SEDAR 
process, and that’s where they get some of this on-the-water 
qualitative stuff, and that’s been a really good -- I think the 
scientists would agree that that’s hugely beneficial, and this 
just widens that and provides more.

One of the interesting things I hear when I go to SEDARs is 
that, at least from the recreational side, is that they will 
change targets on the fisheries. They will start targeting 
something else, and that’s a lag when it shows up in the data,
right, and so, also, this could be very beneficial in validating
some of the MRIP data of that question in the interview, if you
all have ever been interviewed, of what were you targeting.

Maybe this could be brought in to actually validate that and
provide that secondary qualitative level of validating that
actual data, that quantitative part of MRIP, and so it gives
that extra confidence level with some data points, and that
qualitative kind of fits in there to give it a little more
strength, and that’s highly beneficial, but there is lots and
lots of uses that I could already kind of spin on, but thank
you.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Madam Chair.

MS. BOSARGE: Thank you, sir. I’m not on your committee. Dr.
Mickle, the way you summarized this was exactly how I had hoped
it would play out. That was the goal of the idea, was to try
and get a broader scope of fishermen that you could possibly get
some information from during a specific stock assessment, and so
not just general, but here’s what we’re looking at and tell us
what you think and what you’ve seen.

Hopefully it can be interactive, where, if they’re -- As they’re
going through that workshop, if there is a question that they
have, that could be pushed out. You may get some responses
back, but I did have a couple of -- A little bit of feedback for
Emily.

I just want to make sure -- You know, we talked before about
maybe having a vetted list of fishermen that we push this out
to, and we’ve had some back-and-forth about how we do that. We
may have our APs that could be a vetted list or people have gone
through the MREP program, a little bit of background on this
management process and the stock assessment process works, and
that was one thing.

We have talked about, instead of that, maybe you just do a
little computer-based training module that explains to you --
Make sure you have the right expectation for how your
information is going to be used and that you don’t expect that
somebody is going to take your number and plug it into a stock
assessment somewhere, you know if you give a number, but that
this is very much qualitative and a 30,000-foot view to help the
scientists understand maybe something that they are seeing a
trend with this or that.

Then a more specific recommendation is, where you have the
different boxes in the Gulf, and I think it says please choose one, and maybe scroll down a little bit more, or maybe it’s up. Anyway, wherever you choose your box, where you actually -- I would say you might want to say to choose all that apply to your observation. I am thinking more from the commercial perspective, and it may be a fisherman that regularly fishes on one trip from the Panhandle to the mouth of the river, and do you know what I’m saying? If that observation actually applies to that entire area, you would want him to be able to tell you that, he or she, and so that was my one recommendation there.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Thank you, Madam Chair. Greg, I think I saw your hand up.

DR. STUNZ: Yes, I did, and I just wanted to add to that. It kind of falls along Leann’s, and I agree. Being involved and having sat on a lot of the SEDAR-type panels, the fishermen that come there are great, and they contribute, but they don’t have the wealth of knowledge across the whole Gulf, and so this kind of solves this, but growing in a variety of fields is this whole crowd-sourcing kind of way that things are going and the whole wisdom of crowds, and I just wanted to add that, when you poll enough people, largely, the literature is saying that you can get very close to what the experts would say, or even sometimes better, and so we’re really playing to that.

I am saying we’ve got to be careful, obviously, about using this for any type of management advice, but the point is these people that would contribute here know a lot more than a lot of us, and, collectively, they can really get down to the bottom of some answers to complex problems we may have, and so I’m very much for that.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Emily, I know this wasn’t developed in a vacuum. Could you sort of summarize the response or the feeling amongst council staff? Is this something that council staff is enthused with?

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: I believe so. I think that every one of us has echoed the sentiments that Mr. Riechers had expressed, that we want to make sure that, if we are asking anglers to provide this information, that it is made useful in the stock assessment level, and we have also actually discussed -- If you think about Luiz came and give the results of the assessments that were recently done, and we could also consider incorporating a summary, so that you hear the assessment results and then potentially you hear what the anglers are saying.
There are different levels that we can use this information to make people or -- Either the managers or the scientists aware of it, but I would say that, overall, the council staff has been positive to this effort.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Thank you. We have another question from Greg.

DR. STUNZ: Sorry. I forgot to make my main point, and that was that a person that we just put on the -- Well, I guess we don’t want to announce it, but, a person we put on the SSC, their expertise revolves around this, where you have very limited data and you poll people, and, using pretty sophisticated models, you can get at some answers, and so we will have expertise that gets at some of the information that you will be driving on our SSC coming up.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Kevin.

MR. KEVIN ANSON: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I’m not on your committee. I just had a couple of comments, Emily. Good job. As you said, it’s kind of a start, and we’ve been talking about using angler-provided information, and so this could generate some excitement, or certainly some throughput, and it would be worthwhile, I think, to the anglers.

Going back to some of the comments that have already been made and addressing that, to help with the drilling down of the data and to help parse out the data, you might want to add one or two more questions on here to help do that, like species that they’re interested in, and maybe we have a choice of the top eight or ten species that we commonly discuss, or maybe that changes based on the SEDAR schedule or something like that.

That might be helpful, and another thing is -- I might be stealing your thunder a little bit from later on in the agenda, but having the ability to incorporate a link to this from like the Fish Rules app or maybe some of the other states’ apps that have reporting and such, that maybe there is a link there in the future, a maybe you want to report on your observations today type of thing, and that type of thing might be helpful too, to help get the word out and get some more participation and such and information. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: No more discussion?

MR. SWINDELL: Can you scroll down on your listing a little bit on the screen? I want to see the listing of the people and the
box that they have to check as to who they represent. My point
is, if you just -- If you’re a private recreational angler,
you’re going to go out either on your boat or someone else’s
boat, and I know you all have heard me talk about this before,
but I think, as I went out and did red snapper fishing, and a
couple of years ago it’s been, there were six of us on the
vessel. That vessel had to have a deckhand to give us the right
rods and to change hooks and to take off fish and do all the
descending devices and everything else.

I had no earthly idea when I got back just how many fish were
captured and how many fish were let go with what descending
device, et cetera, and why don’t you put on there at least that
you can -- If the MRIP people are doing this data gathering, why
not also add a box for vessel captain or deckhand? The deckhand
person can tell you immediately how many total fish were caught
and how many fish they had to release, and that’s my suggestion.
Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Thank you, Ed. I think that was the original
intent of the federally-permitted for-hire bucket, but I will
defer this question to Emily.

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: Well, we will certainly look into that. I
don’t know that we’re trying to collect information on the
amount of fish that are harvesting and things like that, but I
will look into the association with the fishery category for
sure and try and make sure that I talk with the Science Center
department to see what is the most useful for them.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Thank you, Emily.

MR. SWINDELL: I was doing this for the private recreational
part of the fishery, because people from Kansas may be down
there fishing, and they don’t remember, and they don’t know how
many fish they caught and how many had to be released and how
they were released and so forth, and so I think it would be much
better data gathering from the deckhand or the captain. Thank
you.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Are there any more questions, or can we move
on? Lieutenant.

LT. MARK ZANOWICZ: I just want to echo everyone else’s
sentiments. This looks like a really great tool, but I just had
one specific feedback item. For the general location of
observations, for those boxes, for VMS data that I have seen,
there is a lot of commercial reef fish and HMS vessels that
operate further offshore than those boxes, and I know we don’t
manage HMS, but they can probably provide good information on
stocks we possibly do manage, and so it might be beneficial to
have boxes that are further offshore. That way, if somebody is
further offshore, they can provide spatial information on where
they are seeing this stuff.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Are there any other questions? If not, Emily,
let’s go on to the next item on the agenda.

PRESENTATION - COMMUNICATIONS ANALYTICS

UPDATE - TRANSITION FROM PAPER REGULATIONS TO FISH RULES APP

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: Okay. Thank you. We will certainly tweak this
a little bit and maybe give it a test run, and we will let you
know what the progress is the next time we have a committee
meeting, and so we can go ahead and move on to our presentation
of our communication analytics.

As you’re aware, each quarter we track the analytics of our
communications in the council office and sort of the amount of
people that we touch on a quarterly basis. We’ll start with our
website.

As you probably remember, we redid our website last April, and
that was a pretty large effort, and you can see here -- When I
did these analytics, it was just the first quarter of 2018, but
I was able to finish out 2017. The last that you guys heard
this report was in August of 2017.

With our website, we continue to sort of follow a slight upward
trend in our user shift, which is perfect, in both the sessions,
and so the sort of unique visits to the site, and also the pages
that people are seeing when they go to our site.

It’s also really interesting to sort of take a look at what
people are using when they get to our site. Our federal fishing
regulations that are on our website are the most popular,
besides our homepage, and then it’s interesting, because you can
see sort of the next most popular was our January meeting
briefing book, and then, as we go down, there is sort of just
fishing regulations in general and our council meeting
schedules, and so I think that this actually kind of follows an
expectable trend. Most people are there for the regulations,
but there is also a group of users that is there for our meeting
materials and things like that.

You will also see this little pie graph, and it shows the unique
users versus our returning visitors, and it’s pretty average to have such a great proportion of unique users. I bet that a lot of those unique users are accessing our regulations, and our returning visitors, I am going to suspect, are most of the ones that are going for the meeting materials and getting a little bit deeper into the website and looking for council things.

Here are our Facebook analytics, and, again, we’re sort of following this upward trend. We have an increase in followers every quarter, and we also have a fluctuating engagement, and you will see that, in most of our analytics, we have this spike that happens around April. That is typically associated with our announcement of the red snapper season.

This year’s spike is not on here, but it’s actually a little bit smaller than it has been in past years, because a lot of our communications actually directed folks to the state agencies who were responsible for the red snapper season this year, but, again, we continue an upward trend in our engagements on Facebook.

Moving forward, this is our listserv for our email, and so we use Constant Contact, and so this is the number of subscribers and also the number of publications that we have had, and you can see that we’re just looking at the first quarter of 2018 in the table, versus the annual numbers, and we have a really great open rate. Anywhere upwards of a third is considered to be really good when you are talking about an email listserv, and so people who are getting our emails are appropriately getting our emails is kind of what that tells us.

Our YouTube Channel continues to have climbs in views. We did not produce any videos in the first quarter of this year, which is why we don’t have any specific video views. However, the total views of all of our videos this year, and not just the ones that we have published in the year, continue to sort of follow an upward trend, and so we’re doing well there.

Moving on, our blog, which is a place where we kind of house the articles that we write and then disseminate those through different channels, continues to remain steady, with a slight upward trend, and so we’re pretty happy about that.

Then our newsletter, and our newsletter is the only analytic -- Well, it’s one of the two analytics that seems to be following a little bit of a downward trend. We have made some internal changes to the newsletters, and we brought this up to our technical committee when we met, and the technical committee
really actually sort of gave us the perspective that the newsletter is not necessarily a tool that we should be using to contact the general public and that it’s actually something that agency personnel focus on more, and so each one of the folks who do fisheries stuff for a living that sat on that panel said that they really enjoy the newsletter and that maybe the general fisherman doesn’t want to sit down and read five pages of newsletter things, but that people who do this for a living and they open up their email box and they are still considered at work when they are reading our newsletter might be the audience.

With that, the sort of internal discussions that we’ve had is that maybe we’re going to start gearing that newsletter to that audience a little bit more.

Moving to our final metric, which leads into our next conversation, is our regulations app. As you can see, we’ve been following a downward trend in the use of our regulations app for a couple of years now. Our app is quite out of date, and the analytics are showing that that’s true, and it also turns out that there are other apps that have been popping up that are gaining popularity, and so I just wanted to use this as sort of a transition to our next discussion, which is that we have decided to stop using our current app.

We have that Gulf Council fishing regulations app that we have actually entered into an agreement with Fish Rules. Fish Rules is the industry leader, as far as we are concerned, in hosting the fishing regulations from Maine all the way down the east coast of the United States, and so we figured we would jump on that bandwagon.

Now we are transitioning away from our old app, and we will be transitioning to using Fish Rules. To Kevin’s point earlier, one of the coolest parts about Fish Rules is that there will be a section where we can add information like our anecdotal data collection tool, and we will also be able to integrate, if we have public hearings coming up on a species, we can always notice people through the app.

If you are looking at red snapper regulations, there will be a notification that says that the council will be hosting public hearings on this issue, and then you can click a link to go to it, and so it’s got some increased functionality over what our current app does, and so I think that is going to be a really nice way to sort of continue to build our community.

Also, Fish Rules also already has tenfold more users than we do,
and so we will be entering into sort of a captive audience already, and we also will be working in the coming weeks on transitioning away and making sure that our current users to our current app can transition over to Fish Rules with ease, which will continue to be a free app from the user standpoint.

Then we’re also going to transition away from our printed regulations, and that’s a little bit of how we sort of financially justify moving over to Fish Rules, is we have been printing less and less fishing regulations, and we will now not do a big run of prints that we then send out or distribute.

We will be making postcards that direct people to this app or to our website, and we are always willing to print our regulations and send them to individuals if that is their preferred mechanism, but, as time goes on -- We didn’t print our regulations for the first half of this year, a lot because I was out on leave and a lot because it presented a really good opportunity for us to figure out how badly people missed them, and I think we had less than seven people contact us looking for those regulations.

I feel pretty comfortable in moving away from the paper regulations into the role of using apps and using our website to communicate those regulations, especially since our regulations change so frequently, and so, with that, is there any questions or discussions about our transitions over to the app or our communications analytics, and I know I kind of slid from one right to the other there.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Is there any questions for Ms. Muehlstein? Kevin.

MR. ANSON: Thank you again, Mr. Chair. Again, I’m not on your committee. Emily, you said you had an agreement with Fish Rules, and did that agreement include any money, and what’s the stipulation regarding if, for whatever reason, the communication problem isn’t there and they don’t upload information on a timely basis, and what’s the out, as far as that, so you can kind of limit some of that PR?

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: That’s a great question. The reason that we have entered into a relationship with Fish Rules is, one, because they are the industry leader and they already have that audience, and the other thing that they have done, and they have done this for the South Atlantic, because the South Atlantic uses them, is I will be the one that is hosting those regulations through the Fish Rules platform.
Just like our current app, and I’m the one that goes into the backside and make sure that everything is current, and so they have now given me control over the Gulf portion of Fish Rules, and so we don’t have to rely on a third party any longer to make sure that those regulations are correct.

The developer of the app is already hosting the Gulf regulations, and he would kind of contact me every once in a while to groundtruth what he was doing, but, in our official agreement now, we at the council will be responsible for hosting the Gulf federal regulations, and then, regarding the financial portion of it, yes, there is a financial contract, and I think it’s costing us $4,000 per year, and we’re in a five-year contract, and that is the -- Strangely enough, that’s about the exact amount of money that we were spending on printing the regulations, and so it kind of ends up being a wash, as far as our budget is concerned.

MR. ANSON: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Are there any other questions on anything that Emily has discussed? I think we’re getting near the end, but, Emily, I will pass it back to you.

SUMMARY OF O&E TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: Okay, and so that leads us to our last agenda item, which is just finalizing the report of the O&E Technical Committee, and, actually, as we’ve gone through the other items on the agenda today, we have touched on everything that the O&E recommended, and so I don’t have anything further on the agenda item.

OTHER BUSINESS

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Thank you very much. You did all the heavy lifting at this meeting, and I appreciate it. I have the last item, and let me tee that up. The council has evidenced a strong desire to reduce discard mortality, and the Outreach and Education Technical Committee has evidenced a strong commitment to also develop efforts on that behalf, and we have stakeholder groups that are making significant investments in time and effort and, in some cases, money to reduce discard mortality.

One of the things we need, in order to be successful over time, is we need to establish a starting point. We need some data, and so the committee asked to have some data presented at this
meeting, and the next two pieces of data that I’m going to share were not available at that outreach committee meeting which was held just a few months ago, but they are available now, and the two focuses here are -- The first chart will show a summary of discard mortality by species.

The second one will show -- I’m sorry. The first chart shows a discard summary, and this is a calculation, if you will, of discards by species and by year for both commercial and for recreational. The second chart will show the mortality rate of those discards in the same manner, broken down by fish and by category of fishing.

Now, Clay, my intent is not to try to defend the accuracy of these numbers at this time. This is a first stab in developing data that can be used to measure progress towards reducing discard mortality, because I’m sure that everyone involved in this process has the same comment of how do we know if we’re being successful and how do we know if all these efforts and time and money expended is generating any result.

Our goal is to ultimately have tools that we can use to measure the success of these various forms of discard mortality reduction, and so that’s what we’re trying to do here, and I think we have the second chart up now, and could we go back to the first one, please?

I will let everybody look through this. I won’t attempt to defend the numbers, but you can see that we have a significant number of discards in almost every category, and so this is a worthy task for the council and the committee to pursue.

Now, the second chart, if you could please put that up, the second chart is a first pass at trying to measure mortality by species for both commercial, charter, private, and headboat, and so, rather than get into the weeds about defending the data, we can see that any reduction would significantly improve the population of remaining fish in the ecosystem, and that’s what we want to accomplish.

I am going to open this up for any discussion on this data, and it’s probably the first time any of us have seen it, including myself, and so I would like to open this up for discussion and comments.

DR. TOM FRAZER: When I was pulling up the first chart, I wasn’t sure what the source of that information was.
CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Very good question. I am going to pass that over to Clay, because I am not sure either.

DR. PORCH: Those were the ones that we sent up that would have been our calculations, and Shannon is nodding her head, and so maybe, Shannon, you could interject, because I think you did it.

DR. SHANNON CASS-CALAY: These come from the most recent stock assessment of each species, and they are the numbers that were data inputs to the stock assessment, and so the stock assessment may actually fit these data differently, but these are the inputs, and so these are the information that we received through data workshops, and they are in numbers of fish, and these are actually the strata that are available from the stock assessment, and these are five-year averages within each cell, and, in some cases -- I just wanted to point out, especially in that 2015 forward, they represent fewer than five samples, and so there may be -- They are a five-year computation, but there may be only one or two years of data represented in that cell.

These are released. These are total discards, and so you need to apply a discard mortality rate to compute the dead discards, and that’s where these numbers come from. These are the discard mortality rates that are actually used in the most recent stock assessment of each of these species.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: That would be Slide 2, if we can put that up there, please. Any other questions about this data? Now, recognize that this is a starting point. We want input on how we can improve the availability of data, and so this is important input so that we can provide a real useful tool here, and I am not trying to defend the numbers, and Dr. Cass-Calay isn’t either at this point, but we’re looking for feedback. Greg.

DR. STUNZ: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. I do have a comment, because I think part of these tables were driven from a motion that I made at the last meeting or so, and what I was looking for there was related to Emily and a lot of questions that I think she was getting and I was getting as well for exactly what you pointed out. It was where is the bang for our buck and how many fish are discarded, and, if we use these tools, what would it look like.

Shannon, first, I appreciate you putting these together, and I guess my comment, and please, Clay or Shannon, correct me if I’m wrong, but some of the discussion we had yesterday -- These numbers, like you’re saying, are far from perfect, and it’s
probably some of the least refined data that we have, because it’s just very hard to collect these type of data, and I think Clay mentioned that as well, and so I agree that this is a good starting point.

My real question would be sort of for Emily here, in a way, Emily and Shannon. We couldn’t really present -- I am back on the other table now, if we use red snapper as the example, and we couldn’t really present this to the public, because it’s the handline east and west and the discard fleets during the closed season and such, but what I’m assuming, Emily, is that you could distill this down by summing these across to get at maybe what is the whole recreational discard and what is the commercial and so on.

That would be my first question, and my second question that I would have is that -- Shannon mentioned that these were assessment-derived discards, in some cases, and, in all the documents I look at, the recreational numbers I see here are pretty close. There is a lot of differences, but they’re not that far apart. That is not so much the case on the commercial side.

What I see here are sometimes a lot less than what you see in other documents, and so I don’t know what is the most appropriate numbers to use, and maybe there is not, because this data is still so -- It’s a little bit more elusive or whatever, but I just want to make sure that what Emily has providing to the public is the best, up-to-date, summarized information we’ve got.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Right, and I’m going to pass this over to Emily in just a second, but just remember the overriding intent is to get discard mortality out of the closet and into the light, where we start to talk about this with some hard numbers, and so we don’t have any great data to date, and this is a first pass to get feedback and information from the council on where we want to go with this. Emily.

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: Thank you. My understanding is that this table is showing us the total discards, and, like Greg mentioned, it’s sort of breaking it up into the different sectors, but also into different modes of fishing and different regions.

Then the other table is showing the percentage mortality of discards, and so I actually feel like -- Please correct me if I’m wrong, but what I can do is kind of combine the two tables to come up with this really, really ballpark estimation of what
the actual dead discards are.

If I have the information on total discards and then I have the percentage of dead discards from that, we can come up with an idea, and I can certainly craft some language in the tools that we use that does point to the fact that this is a very broad estimation, but we could be potentially impacting this number of fish, and so it looks like, from the combination of these two tables, we can actually derive a number of fish for the different species and the different types of fishing, and I would be comfortable finding ways to use that in my communications.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Are there any other questions regarding the data? Clay.

DR. PORCH: Thank you. I just wanted to respond to a couple of the comments that were made. Some of this information, in terms of discard mortality rates, is fairly well-founded. There is a number of studies, and we looked at them collectively.

The problem is, if you do a scientific study and you, for instance, demonstrate that venting cuts release mortality in half or whatever the number ends up being, we don’t know, necessarily, how well those procedures are being implemented in the general fishing community, and that’s the point that you were raising, and so that’s the gap that we have.

All we can do is say, okay, there was a venting regulation, and we expect that, at a given depth, you would decrease the release mortality rate by X percent, and then we would just apply that to the information we have on the depth of fishing, which, as I mentioned yesterday, is less than perfect, and so that’s why information like what you might be collecting on your website and this web app would be quite useful.

On the other hand, there are some other species where the discard mortality rate is not that well known, and gray trigger, for example, you saw that I think we assumed something like 5 percent, and that is based largely, if I recall, on testimony of fishermen that essentially says they are indestructible and they can sit on the deck for a while and you throw them back and they are healthy, which seems like it makes sense, but we just saw a presentation at the South Atlantic Council where the depth associated with barotrauma was actually really high.

If they are in deeper water, or I think over a hundred feet or so, you actually have a high fraction dying from barotrauma,
because, essentially, when you get the descended intestines coming through the mouth and stomach, they catch on the pharyngeal teeth, and so it ends up cutting them all up or they get snagged and they can’t eat again, and so, potentially, it’s a lot higher than what we’ve been assuming, and so I don’t want to make it sound like there is not more work to be done.

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Thank you. Are there other questions? Barring no more questions, that ends our presentation, and we are done. Thank you.

MR. SWINDELL: Can I interject something?

CHAIRMAN DYSKOW: Certainly. Go ahead.

MR. SWINDELL: Mr. Dyskow, I really appreciate all the work you’ve done on all of this. I think you did a good job of putting it all together, and I appreciate you taking over my place on this committee, and it also helped you, I think, learn more detail about what’s really going on, and so, maybe together, we can make this even more fruitful in the future. Thank you.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on June 20, 2018.)