GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

OUTREACH & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Hilton Clearwater Beach Resort         Clearwater Beach, Florida

June 20, 2016

VOTING MEMBERS
Roy Williams.................................Florida
Pamela Dana........................................Florida
Dale Diaz.........................................Mississippi
Myron Fischer (designee for Patrick Banks)...........Louisiana
Greg Stunz........................................Texas

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Kevin Anson (designee for Chris Blankenship)..........Alabama
Leann Bosarge........................................Mississippi
Doug Boyd................................................Texas
Roy Crabtree........................NMFS, SERO, St. Petersburg, Florida
John Greene..............................................Alabama
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Kelly Lucas (designee for Jamie Miller).................Mississippi
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Douglas Gregory................................Executive Director
Morgan Kilgour................................Fishery Biologist
Ava Lasseter.............................Anthropologist
Mara Levy................................NOAA General Counsel
Emily Muehlstein........................Fisheries Outreach Specialist
Kathy Pereira.............................Meeting Planner/Travel Coordinator
Charlene Ponce...........................Public Information Officer
Ryan Rindone..........................Fishery Biologist/SEDAR Liaison
Bernadine Roy.................................Office Manager
Charlotte Schiaffo..............Research and Human Resource Librarian
Carrie Simmons............................Deputy Director

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The Outreach & Education Committee of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council convened at the Hilton Clearwater Beach Resort, Clearwater Beach, Florida, Monday morning, June 20, 2016, and was called to order at 10:02 a.m. by Chairman Roy Williams.

ADOPITON OF AGENDA

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS

CHAIRMAN ROY WILLIAMS: The agenda for the Outreach and Education Committee appears at Tab O, Number 1, and the first item of business is Adoption of the Agenda. First, let me just say the committee members are myself, Dr. Stunz, Myron Fischer, somebody from the Coast Guard, and I doubt if Rear Admiral Callahan is here, but Dr. Dana, Dale Diaz, and David Walker. Is there any objection to the agenda that is before us? Hearing no objection, we will adopt that agenda.

The next thing is Approval of the Minutes, which are at Tab O, Number 2. We probably ought to have a formal motion here. Could we get a motion to adopt the minutes, approve the minutes?

DR. GREG STUNZ: So moved.

MR. MYRON FISCHER: Second.

CHAIRMAN WILLIAMS: Moved by Dr. Stunz and second by Myron Fischer. Is there discussion? Any objection? Hearing none, the minutes are approved. The next item is Item III, Action Guide and Next Steps, and that appears to Tab O, Number 3, and I will turn it over to Charlene Ponce at this point. Charlene.

REPORT OF O&E TECHNICAL COMMITTEE MEETING

MS. CHARLENE PONCE: Good morning. I just want to refresh your memory. Last year, we reorganized the Outreach & Education Advisory Panel, and we made it into a technical committee. We added Sea Grant members, NGOs, and a media representative, and so we’ve sort of expanded their scope from being just an advisory body to they’re also going to partner with us and actually help us with our communications, help us get our communications out.

We had our first meeting at the beginning of June, and we hope to meet at least once a year to work on council education and outreach issues. I guess I will just go on to the report.
The committee met on June 1 and 2 at the council office. They elected their Chair and Vice Chair. Shelly Krueger was elected Chair and Rich Abrams was elected Vice Chair. The committee approved the previous meeting minutes as written, and then staff gave the newly-appointed members sort of an orientation on what to expect.

Staff then gave an overview of current council outreach, education and communication initiatives, and a summary of the follow-up stakeholder communication survey that we conducted late last year. Just to go a little bit into the survey, some of you will recall that we did a stakeholder communication survey back in 2013, and that was sort of just to get a baseline on how effective our communications are, what people are using, what is their go-to method, and we did a follow-up survey late last year.

I won’t go over the whole survey, but I would like to point out a couple of the things that stood out. We had questions on there about our website and our communications in general, how easy or how difficult is it to navigate our website and how easy or difficult are our communications to understand, and we noticed that we had a 3 percent increase in difficulty for both of those things.

We looked our analytics. Emily and I have been keeping analytics on all of our communications for probably the last three years, and we noticed that, while there was an increase in people’s difficulty to understand, we also noticed that we had a 50 percent increase in our website traffic from the last survey to the most recent survey, and we also had a 45 percent increase in our email subscribers, and so it’s possible that the reason that we had that 3 percent increase in difficulty was because we’ve had such an increase in the number of people who are actually looking at our materials.

One of the other things that I wanted to point out is that we figured out that YouTube, our blog, and our Facebook page came back -- They ranked basically they same as they did in 2013, as underutilized. In follow-up questions, we found that the reason they weren’t being used is people didn’t know they existed, but a follow-up question to that showed that, now that people know that they’re available, they will continue to use them, and so we feel like we will gain, both in awareness and in usage, on those three things.

Here again, we looked at our analytics for these three things, and we found that, from 2013 to 2015, our YouTube usage has gone
up by about 75 percent. Our blog reads have gone up by as much as 74 percent. Our Facebook likes have doubled and then, in
Facebook, you can measure engagements and reach, and engagements went up by 57 and reach went up by 78, and so we feel like we’re really making some gains in our reach, and we’re kind of proud of that.

At the end of the survey, we had an opportunity for folks to give comments. Not everybody commented. We got about 112 comments, and 25 percent of those were not related to communications. It was we want a year-round red snapper season and raise the bag limit. Another 25 percent were very complimentary of our communications, and then 50 percent we sort of divided up into three categories: awareness, perception, and areas of improvement.

Based on those results, the communications group, our panel, our committee, developed a spreadsheet. It’s on page 3 of your backup, and it sort of addresses the challenges that we identified, and we came up with this matrix, and I won’t go through the whole thing, but I will just highlight some of the things that we plan on doing.

Again, we plan on doing these with our member partners, which is our technical committee: partnering with fishermen in the community to build stronger relationships to mitigate adversarial interactions; working with our partners on the Outreach and Education Technical Committee to disseminate targeted publications; using translation services for written materials, when appropriate, and real-time interpreters during live meetings; develop more info-graphics and videos to sort of make it easier to understand the information that we’re trying to impart on people; develop protocols to recognize participation in public hearings and scoping meetings and provide follow-up information on council actions; develop a network of tackle shops for information dissemination and hold a series of workshops to explain how data are collected.

On that one, some of you have participated in the Marine Resource Education Program Science Workshop, and so what we have in mind for this sort of a much more pared down version of that, and try to go around the Gulf and try to get people to understand how data are collected and how they are used.

Then staff provided an overview of the Gulf Council Data Portal. You are going to get a presentation on that later in the week, but the technical committee heard that and discussed potential outreach methods to inform people about deep-water corals and
the tools that we have available on our portal.

They gave us suggestions on how to do that, including presenting at professional conferences, reaching out to online fishing magazines, marine sanctuaries, diving clubs, and other organizations.

Then, finally, the committee discussed the potential for a shared photo library. We are always looking for new photos to use in our publications, as are state representatives, and so we thought we could come together and come up with some sort of portal where we could share photographs. We talked about administrative rights and photo credits, and so Emily and I will be putting together a set of protocols on how to set that up and how people will access it and what the rules will be.

Then, Thursday, the meeting -- It lasted pretty much all day, but it was basically a training session for members and for us. It was put on by the Water Words That Work folks. It had three sessions: Culturally Sensitive and Targeted Outreach; Messages that Connect; and Combat Communication for Conservationists. It was very interactive. We broke out into small groups, and we had little scenarios that we were given and we had to work through them. Unless Roy has anything he wants to add, that’s really all I have.

CHAIRMAN WILLIAMS: Thank you very much, Charlene. I have nothing else. Are there questions for Charlene? Dale Diaz and then Dr. Stunz.

MR. DALE DIAZ: Thank you, Ms. Ponce. When you were going through this multicultural approach to communications, and maybe having people available to translate, I am just trying to figure out how you’re going to know ahead of time. I mean the Gulf Council meetings that I’ve been to in the area where I am at, there just hasn’t been a need for that, but I could see, on some issues, where it might arise, but you wouldn’t be able to be prepared.

Like, in Mississippi, in the times where we’ve had to do these translation type of things, it’s mostly with the Vietnamese community, and, fortunately, we have been able to know that there’s enough interest generated from that community ahead of time to be able to set that up, but I’m just wondering how you’re going to be able to know ahead of time.

For the Vietnamese community in Mississippi, I would imagine, if you were going to get them out, a shrimp issue might do it, but
how are you going to plan to deal with that ahead of time and be prepared?

**MS. PONCE:** Well, so, we’ve done it in the past, actually. Doug had us hire an interpreter for a meeting we had in the Keys, because we knew we were going to have a large Hispanic population present, and, again, you’re right that we’re not going to always know, but there are going to be times when, based on the issue and the location, we can get a pretty good idea, and so we had an interpreter, and it was very successful, and people were very happy that we did it.

For example, when we do 17B, that might be a good time to get a Vietnamese interpreter when we’re out in the areas where we know that that community is going to be present, and so it’s really something that we’re just going to have to trial and error.

**CHAIRMAN WILLIAMS:** Dr. Stunz.

**DR. STUNZ:** I am just wondering, and I’m new to the committee, and so I’m just trying to learn. I am not real clear, and maybe there is some documents I can read, and I couldn’t quite find it easily from the webpage, but what’s the goals for the committee? Is this to get information out or what’s the primary goals? The reason I’m asking that is because, depending on what our goals are -- I mean obviously if you look on the Facebook, for example, it’s pretty darned adversarial, and do we want that or do we not? I don’t know. Is it a place to vent or do we want to do more I guess what I might consider positive things, like outreach of information and outreach of better ways to fish or maybe ways to reduce discard mortality. I don’t know. You name it, but it seems to me that it’s -- I am not real clear on what exactly we’re trying to do.

Then, finally, my last question for, I guess I’m not sure who, is about some analytics to look at -- You guys just presented some good stuff, but you can get analytics that show on a regional basis where people are coming from and where they’re going to your outreach media, and it allows us to see if we’re missing certain groups or certain areas, and I would be interested to see that maybe next time. I mean this isn’t some pressing issue, but I’m trying to, in general, figure out where do we want to be in terms of our outreach, particularly as it relates to social media.

**MS. PONCE:** The charge of this group is essentially for them to assist us, staff and the council, in meeting the goals and objectives that are outlined in our strategic communications
plan, and I can send you a copy of that. I’m not sure if it’s on our website, but it was approved by the council. They would do that by sharing their knowledge and their expertise and resources and helping us disseminate information to the different groups.

For example, a lot of the states will take our press releases or meeting notices and send them out, but they explain to us that sometimes that’s cumbersome, because we have ten different meetings, and maybe only one is in Mississippi, and they’ve got to cull through this whole list of meetings.

We came up with a solution that we’ll send out our regular meeting notice, but we will do a separate one for each state, so that they don’t have to repackage. They can just send it out, and so, really, they’re going to be our partners and help us develop tactics on how to get information out.

We didn’t really discuss the value of social media. We discuss that in our office a lot, and I think we have differing views on that, but, as you can see by our analytics, I mean we’re reaching an enormous amount of people, and these numbers are from 2015, and so I know it’s grown since then.

I know Emily has some opinions on that, and I don’t know if we want to get into that discussion today, but, essentially, what this group is doing is they are sort of serving in an advisory capacity on improving our communications and developing new methods and also serving as boots-on-the-ground and helping us disseminate that information.

CHAIRMAN WILLIAMS: Okay. Greg, do you have -- Did that answer all of your questions?

DR. STUNZ: Yes, it’s getting there. If you could provide the communications plan, and I’m sure I could dig it up, but it would be nice if you just sent that section around. It would be good, so I can be a better committee member and figure out what the real goals are, but also, the analytics you’re talking about -- In the report that I am looking at, and maybe I’m just missing something, but where can those analytics be found?

MS. PONCE: Those are something that Emily and I just do on a quarterly basis. We keep them on our server in the office. I can share those with you, of course.

DR. STUNZ: Yes, just for informational purposes. I would be interested just to see, so we can kind of get a feel for kind of
what is what. I guess my other concern would be the adversarial thing. If you guys are looking on our Facebook page at the Gulf Council, it sounds like our discussions around the table are much worse than public testimony, and so I can’t help but wonder, when I read that, and I read it just to get a general tone kind of for what’s going on. Pretty much what you see on there is the polar ends of the viewpoints and not so much in the middle.

That’s informative, in a way, but I am also questioning, is that a positive thing? To me, it doesn’t seem as positive as putting out some -- I am trying to remember the last thing Emily sent about something for a real positive basis, but it always seems like it gets hijacked back into the red snapper controversy.

MS. EMILY MUEHLSTEIN: I can address that really quickly, just since it’s on the table. The thing about Facebook is you’re right that it is very adversarial, and there are some theories on participation that say basically the 10 percent from either side of the scale is going to be your vocal minority, and so those tend to be -- There is about twenty people that continuously post on the social media feed.

What you’re not seeing sort of as a council member and you’re not an administrator of the page, is, for example, our email list has about 5,000 people on it, and one Facebook post will get up to 60,000 in a day, and so the one thing that Facebook does that you can’t really get from any other avenue is it spreads like wildfire.

If you look at 60,000 people getting that information and then twenty-five people saying something rude, that’s pretty good, actually. It doesn’t sound good and it doesn’t feel good a lot of the time, but, if you want, we can sort of discuss the way that I moderate that page.

I mean there is some wisdom to not letting people comment at all, and that does though sort of shut down the dialogue that could happen, and so there are some theories that we can go into, and I would be happy to discuss that on any level at any time if it’s something that makes you guys uncomfortable, but I would say that really, just for the reach and for that automatic instant gratification of being able to get our information off, that social media, Facebook in particular, is our most effective way to say a sentence and get the most people on the Gulf Coast that are fishermen and that are engaged in our community to get that information.
DR. STUNZ: I think that’s great, Emily, and I think sharing some of those analytics that you’re talking about would really help, because, as a public person going in and just looking at the Facebook and not being able to have access, all you see is just sort of this negative back-and-forth stuff.

I am not saying at all that we go away from social media. I mean I am all about social media, but I am just trying to portray it in the most positive way possible, and sometimes when I look on there, it’s not.

If you haven’t, you probably should look on there to see, and is that something we want or do we -- I don’t really know where I am on this, but do we curb some of that ability to post those comments or do we just let it free flow? I don’t know, but, from someone looking out and not realizing that reach post is getting 60,000 reach or something, you just sort of see a lot of negative comments up there.

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: It may seem like we don’t groom it, but we do. What I have seen is that actually it becomes a learning opportunity. If you notice, I pretty much respond to everything, even when people are being really negative, and so it ends up, even if that person is not getting the point, it provides an opportunity for me to answer technically or with a link to a blog or with an explanation of some kind.

I guess my thought, and maybe I’m wrong, is that, even if somebody is angry and they come at you and then I give a response, somebody that is reading that from the outside can say, hey, this guy is mad and here is how they answered, and it’s then a learning opportunity as well. Again, I am happy to sort of discuss how that happens.

CHAIRMAN WILLIAMS: Okay. Doug, did you still want to speak? Then I have Kevin after that.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR DOUG GREGORY: I encourage all the council members to monitor our Facebook page. If this concern is of more than just one or two people, yes, we can do that. Now, what we have done, in extreme cases, is kick people off the Facebook page. Sometimes it’s been effective and sometimes they sign on as other names, but it is disconcerting to hear all that negativity and the misinformation that goes on there, but you heard from Emily the broader picture of it too, but it is an ongoing discussion we have within the office, because it disturbs us as well.
CHAIRMAN WILLIAMS: A quick question for you. When you say you have kicked them off and they sign on under a different name -- I am not a Facebooker, and so I don’t know the answer to this, but do people sign on in their real name, or do they have one of these phony names like a lot of the forums have?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR GREGORY: Most people use their own name, and it’s easy to recognize who they are.

MS. MUEHLSTEIN: That’s a distinct advantage of using Facebook over something like going onto one of those fishing forums, like if you think about the Whole Truth or Florida Sportsmen, where they can sign on under an alias and don’t have to be a person. In order to participate in our Facebook page, you have to have your own account, which is typically populated with your family and pictures of your friends, and so there is actually a sort of accountability on Facebook that you don’t seek or you don’t get from some of those other fishing forums that can be just as negative, if not worse, because there is an external moderator instead of us that can determine sort of what the dialogue looks like.

CHAIRMAN WILLIAMS: Thank you. Kevin.

MR. KEVIN ANSON: Thank you. I’m not on your committee, but, Dr. Stunz, I too had wrestled with what’s the benefit and what are we getting or gaining from having Facebook interactions to the folks that post comments on there, and I talked to Emily about this on one or two occasions in the past, and I think, in the end, at least right now, my opinion is that there is some benefit in having that direct interaction, where Emily can respond to these comments and to the folks that are bringing up negative comments about the process, because it does two things. It provides an opportunity to allow them to vent, but then for Emily, representing the council at least in that venue, to provide some feedback, and that negativity, I think, draws in folks, and so it’s kind of a double-edged sword. People like conflict, because it kind of gets their juices flowing and kind of gets them drawn into that thing, and so, for now, I see that, overall, there is a benefit to having it the way it’s set up right now.

Now, as far as addressing some of those more negative folks or people that have negative comments, maybe Emily could couch her response a little bit more of, well, that’s a good point. However, the council considered that and this is their decision or this is what the decision is, and so maybe just the tone or
how she responds might be something that could kind of assuage what you’re maybe getting at.

CHAIRMAN WILLIAMS: All right. Any other questions for Emily from the committee or the council? All right. Hearing none, is there any other business to come before the committee? Thank you very much, Charlene, for your presentation. I believe we are adjourned.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned at 10:25 a.m., June 20, 2016.)