

Outreach and Education Technical Committee Report

November 15, 2021

2021 Communications Improvement Plan Review

Staff reviewed the 2021 Communications Improvement Plan and provided an update on its progress. In 2021, the following items on the Improvement Plan were accomplished:

- Transitioned to hosting the Gulf Currents blog on the Council website and increased the frequency and timeliness of article production. However, a quarterly blog digest has not yet been sent through the listserv.
- Improved listserv membership by creating a pop-up on press release webpages, posting on social media, and creating a QR code to encourage sign-up.
- Reinvigorated the use of Facebook and started to use Instagram.
- Conducted a renaming contest for its Something's Fishy tool, placed all previous Something's Fishy summaries on its Fisheries Science webpages, and increased response rates by encouraging the Council communication network to share opportunities. Staff has not yet created a one-page explanation of the tool or successfully researched the expedited approval process through the Paperwork Reduction Act.
- Created Fisheries Science webpages for SEDAR stock assessment links, stock assessment executive reports, one-page hot sheets and infographics.
- Hired a contractor to optimize the use of Google forms and enhance our online public comment process.

- Drafted communications guidelines for social media, public comment, and press releases.
- Developed and launched Fish Rules for the commercial sector.

Staff has not yet enhanced video production by creating short informational clips and staff has not yet begun to develop species specific, interactive history of management timelines.

The Outreach and Education Technical Committee (Committee) noted the improvements in blogging efforts and specifically discussed the controversy and success of the article “Am I Using the Right Bait or Should I Switch?” The Committee also applauded the new Fisheries Science webpages and suggested that the Council add information on fisheries independent indices. The Committee also asked staff to consider creating a webpage that serves as one central repository for resources that are useful to anglers such as NOAA’s quota monitoring tables, Southeast Fisheries Science Center stock assessment reports, and the MRIP Query Tool. NOAA staff suggested that they team up with the Council to create a one-stop shop for anglers. The Committee supported staff’s desire to focus future efforts on creating short informational videos and suggested that staff move forward with creating the species-specific history of management timelines.

2021 Communications Analytics

Staff summarized the Council’s 2021 Communication Analytics. Website sessions and page views continue an upward trend and are tracking higher overall than in past years. Fishing

regulations, Council meeting materials, and SSC meeting materials pages are the most frequently visited content on the site. The use of the recreational Fish Rules app has nearly doubled since 2019 with red drum, gag grouper, and greater amberjack receiving the most inquiries. The number of listserv subscribers continues to increase and the open-rate, though slightly down from past years, remains quite high at approximately 30%. Facebook engagements and reach are up dramatically and staff attributes the spike in interaction to increased staff effort on the platform. Interestingly, blog readership appears to be down despite increased frequency in posting. This could be due in part, to the change in platform and a potential mismatch of analytic metrics. Finally, staff reviewed in-person public hearing attendance and asked for guidance on how to host hearings and encourage participation more efficiently.

The Committee discussed in-person public hearing attendance and considered the utility of a survey to gauge stakeholder interest in attending in-person public hearings. Staff discussed their current process of reviewing previous in-person efforts on similar topics and asking state directors for their preferences. The Committee suggested that the Council should err on the side of caution and hold meetings even if previous analytics don't support the effort because we don't know what kind of turn out we'll have until we attempt to have the meetings. The Committee suggested that staff keep track of both the number of attendees and those who provide public comment received during each effort to further clarify the cost and benefits of holding in-person meetings. The Committee also suggested that staff consider analytics on how extra efforts, including direct mail-outs and Fish Rules push notifications, impact comment and

attendance numbers and asked staff to include these metrics in future communications analytics reports. Finally, the Committee expressed support for consideration of hosting 'Listening Sessions' like the South Atlantic Council hosts. In this meeting format, a local Council member and state agency staff member host the meeting in-person with Council staff joining virtually.

The Committee encouraged staff to increase regularly-scheduled social media posts with positive content and directing anglers to helpful resources. They mentioned that the Council website hosts a plethora of helpful, informational content and we need to direct readers to it. The Committee also recommended using redundant social media posts to drive readers to the blog. The Committee recommended that we open accounts on all social medial platforms, even in we don't intend to use them, simply as a way to prevent fraudulent accounts.

Social Media Guidelines

Staff reviewed draft Council Social Media Guidelines. The Committee suggested that staff modify the "Starting Accounts" section to include the recommendation that staff start accounts for each available social medial platform to prevent fraudulent accounts. The Committee also asked staff to clarify who is responsible for proof reading posts in the "Think Before You Post" section of the document.

The Committee discussed the negativity on the Facebook page and staff explained that there are analytics for the number of visitors to the site that show how posts with numerous negative interactions typically tend to reach huge audiences who choose not to engage. Staff also reminded the Committee that communications staff serves in a customer service role where stakeholders are expected to share negative feedback, and this is reflected on the Council Facebook page. The Committee encouraged staff to provide examples of these post specific analytics and agreed that often, even negativity on social media encourages positive engagement because fishermen question what's happening and end up getting involved in the process. The Committee also discussed the algorithm used to determine who sees each post and noted that any interaction with a post allows that post to spread to more users. South Atlantic staff mentioned that their Information and Education Advisory Panel and their Council plans to discuss social media engagement in the coming months. Staff committed to discussing this topic during the January Committee Meeting including background information on the algorithm and the South Atlantic's outcomes.

Public Comment Guidelines

Staff reviewed draft Council Public Comment Guidelines. The Committee recommended that staff add information on what happens to comments when a commentor misses a comment deadline. The Committee also expressed appreciation for the development of this document because it's helpful for staff and the public alike.

Press Release Guidelines

Staff reviewed draft Council Press Release Guidelines. The Committee offered no suggestions or further discussion about the document.

Something's Fishy Renaming

Staff presented the Committee with a list of submissions for its Something's Fishy Renaming Contest. The Committee expressed support for the following: Fisherman Feedback, Hook-Up, Reel-Time Comments, and Anglers' Angle. Ultimately, the Committee voted to rename Something's Fishy to **Fisherman Feedback** because it was straightforward, appropriate, and explanatory. Staff will notify the winner and send a gift pack of Council branded swag. Staff will also send a press release announcing the winning name change and re-brand the tool.

Return 'Em Right

The Committee heard a presentation on Return 'Em Right, a project that aims to reduce post-release mortality due to barotrauma and encourage best fishing practices to keep released fish alive. The project, funded through the Natural Resource Damage Assessment, includes components on research and monitoring, education and outreach, and distribution of descending devices. The outreach and education component of the project is heavily influenced by recommendations made by the Council's Outreach and Education Technical Committee during the Council's Release Mortality Symposium. Nick Haddad, the Sustainable Fisheries Communications Manager for the project outlined the project timeline and encouraged the Committee to help amplify the project and its efforts.

The Committee discussed the Council's Fishing for Our Future webpages and determined that, while it served as a valuable place holder, the Return 'Em Right project now successfully fills that niche. The Committee noted that the discard dashboard and relevant literature sections should be moved to the Fisheries Science pages on the Council website. The Committee passed the following motion without opposition:

Motion: To eliminate the Fishing for Our Future webpage from the Gulf Council website by redirecting to Return 'Em Right. Add the discard dashboard and literature cited to the Fisheries Science pages on the Council website.

Prioritization of Future Communication Topics

The Committee was asked to help identify and prioritize future communication topics and suggest appropriate mechanisms for communicating them. Staff indicated that Council and Committee members had mentioned the following items for consideration: wild-caught vs. farm-raised seafood, the Marine Resource Information Program Fishing Effort Survey (MRIP-FES), Annual catch limit (ACL) closures, and differentiating the Gulf Council and NOAA's roles in fishery management.

The Committee suggested that the issue of wild-caught vs. farm-raised seafood be deprioritized because many other agencies are doing work on the topic and the Council may not be the most appropriate venue for the discussion. It was noted that the topic is important but, in the Council arena, commercial fishermen might want to prioritize other communication on issues

such as changes to the recreational survey (MRIP-FES) that have triggered the Council to consider re-allocation.

The Committee supported Council efforts to communicate MRIP-FES and its fisheries management implications. While it's not a Council endeavor, it does affect Council decisions.

The Committee suggested that the Council produce a bi-annual report or article to discuss ACL closures. The January edition should explain the potential seasons and limits to set expectations for the year and the June edition should monitor quotas and fine-tune expectations. The Committee also recommended that the Council use short videos (vlogs) to delineate the difference between Council and NOAA's roles in fisheries management. Finally, the committee suggested the Council put effort towards explaining fisheries independent data and indices of abundance.

2022 Communications Improvement Plan

Staff indicated that based on the meeting so far, the following items would be added to the 2022 Communications Improvement Plan:

- Create a central repository on the website that serves as a one-stop-shop for angler resources (quota monitoring, stock assessment reports, MRIP Data Query Tool, etc.).
- Add information on fisheries independent data collection and indices to the Fisheries Science webpages.
- Begin to create vlog content starting with an interview with Dr. Marcus Drymon on barotrauma and depredation during release.

- Create interactive species-specific history of management timelines.
- Create more repetitive social media posts to promote readership of blog articles and keep social media users engaged with our sites.
- Schedule quick, helpful social media posts directing anglers to important resources.
- Open 'place-holder' social media accounts on all social media platforms.
- Continue to connect the public and the Committee with the Return 'Em Right project.

Other Business

MRIP-FES Infographic

The Committee reviewed a draft infographic displaying a timeline, recent changes to MRIP, and FAQs on how MRIP-FES will impact fisheries management decisions. The Committee recommended that staff add the perspective that this is a national issue, not just one faced by the Gulf Council. The Committee also recommended that staff make it clear that increases in estimates of recreational harvest don't necessarily happen each year and that it also varies by species. The Committee also suggested that rather than use an infographic, which is very information heavy, staff create a storyboard or website dedicated to the issue. Finally, the Committee recommended that staff add information on which data currency is used for the stock assessments, quota monitoring, and catch limits for each species.

Council Voting Procedures

The Committee discussed how the pandemic has enhanced one opportunity for public participation by allowing the public to provide testimony virtually. The Committee supported

continuing to allow virtual public testimony because it removes the financial barrier of traveling to attend in-person for stakeholders who wants stay informed and involved. The Committee also discussed how virtual participation is hampered because Council votes held in-person are not seen by virtual attendees. The Committee provided unanimous support for the following motion:

Motion: To recommend that the Council continue exploring ways to make virtual stakeholder meeting interaction easier by utilizing software/hardware to show vote count.

The Meeting Adjourned at 4:00 p.m. EST

Meeting Participants

Kim Amendola

Dan Ellinor

Dr. J. Marcus Drymon

Julie Falgout

Gary Graham

Dylan Hubbard, Chair

Laura Picariello

Charmaine Schmermund

Zack Thomas

Eric Weather, Vice Chair

Jeff Weakley

Tonya Wiley

Danica Williams

Council Staff Attendance

Emily Muehlstein

Bernie Roy

Carly Somerset

John Froeschke

Carrie Simmons

Council Representative

Dr. Greg Stunz

Bob Gill – In Attendance

