

Outreach and Education Technical Committee Report

August 1, 2022

The meeting was called to order at 12:08 PM and staff introduced Nicole Nichols, the new Technical Committee member representing the State of Florida. The agenda was adopted with a modification to address item VI (Return 'Em Right presentation) before item V (Communication Plan to Promote Return of Shrimp Fleet Effort Data). The summary of the November 15, 2021 meeting was adopted with no changes.

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 Return 'Em Right, reported that 155 federally permitted for-hire captains and 9,455 private recreational anglers have completed the learning module and received gear so far.

The Committee confirmed that the DESCEND Act includes a mandate for commercial fishing vessels to have a venting tool or descending device rigged and ready to use when fishing for reef fish. When asked whether the program would target that audience, Mr. Haddad explained that the program's advisors considered targeting commercial anglers, but determined that the magnitude of recreational discards necessitated a focus on that sector, especially since commercial regulations, such as minimum size limits and the Individual Fishing Quota Program, effectively minimize commercial discards.

Communication Plan to Promote Return of Shrimp Fleet Effort Data

The Committee heard a presentation from Rebecca Smith, a NMFS shrimp cellular electronic logbook (cELB) program staff member. Shrimp ELBs stopped transmitting shrimp effort data at the end of 2020 when the 3G cellular network expired. While lacking automatic data transmittal, the cELB units still collect vessel position data, but shrimpers must now manually send the data by mailing the Secure Digital (SD) cards from their units to NOAA Fisheries twice a year. To date, NOAA Fisheries has sent letters and new SD cards in three separate mailings to federal shrimp permit holders, selected by the Science and Research Director, to submit reports in order to retrieve the data. Additionally, NOAA Fisheries wrote a compliance reminder letter and the Council has asked its Shrimp Advisory Panel and its Outreach and Education Technical Committee to help promote SD card return.

The Committee learned that there was no mechanism to account for inactive boats who failed to return effort data. It suggested including a postcard in each mailing that allows operators to return a no-fishing report if they had not been shrimping. The Committee also asked for insights into geographical differences in return rates, or changes in who complied for each effort that could inform future outreach efforts. Ms. Smith committed to asking her data team for more specific information on trends in return rates.

Next, it was noted that a small percentage of the returned SD cards did not contain usable data. The Committee identified that NOAA Fisheries no longer sends quarterly postcards to operators whose units were not operating properly. It suggested that modified postcards be sent to address cELB equipment issues, dry docking, and the like. It was further suggested that NOAA Fisheries begin sending targeted letters to individual operators who have repeatedly been non-compliant.

The Committee identified that shrimpers frequently take trips lasting a month or longer and are often transient, so it can be difficult to communicate with them in a timely and effective manner. It was agreed that face-to-face communication is the most effective way to promote a behavioral change in the industry. The Committee suggested that the gear experts at NOAA's Pascagoula, Mississippi Lab would be an appropriate team to task with face-to-face communications about the importance of SD card return, and this could be accomplished during scheduled workshops. Port

agents dedicated to the Southeast For-Hire Integrated Electronic Reporting Program (SEFHIER) cannot be used to communicate to shrimpers; however, commercial port agents could help communicate SD card return requirements when they encounter shrimp vessels. It was also indicated that the use of NOAA Observers to outreach SD card return requirements might require a change of contract. Sea Grant agents explained that they could assist with face-to-face efforts on an individual basis, if their specific role allows it.

The Committee discussed the need to develop outreach materials that explain why compliance with the return of SD cards is important. It was also recognized that it will likely take 1.5 - 2 years to develop a regulatory document that could be fully implemented with fishermen; thus, mailing the SD cards back to the Science Center in the interim is of great importance. This should include a timeline for returning cards and past examples when shrimp effort data (estimated from the recorded vessel position data) have been used to preserve access to historical fishing grounds. Ultimately, the Committee recommended that NOAA Fisheries coordinate the development of both print and multi-media products. These materials could be distributed by various state and federal staff in a unified voice, as well as posted online to ensure consistent messaging to fishermen. Print materials should be developed and distributed to enhance face-to-face interactions with:

- Sea Grant agents who work with shrimpers
- NOAA port agents
- Pascagoula Lab gear experts
- JEA patrols for compliance assistance
- State agency outreach staff
- Regional and local shrimp associations

Online materials should be developed and shared with the following webpages:

- Gulf Council
- Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
- NOAA Fisheries
- Gulf state websites and social media
- Louisiana Fisheries
- Shrimpers of the South (on Facebook)

- Shrimp Boat Enthusiasts (on Facebook)
- Regional and local shrimp associations

The Committee recognized that these identified outreach efforts could also be used for the rollout of a new shrimp data collection program, when the Council takes final action on its current draft shrimp framework action. The Committee concluded its discussion with the recommendation that these outreach materials and face-to-face efforts should be developed prior to the next mailing of SD cards in January 2023, so they can be distributed alongside the other materials.

Draft Gulf Council Media Guidelines

Staff presented the Committee with draft Media Guidelines designed to inform Council members and staff who represent the Council when responding to media inquiries. Staff explained that this will serve as an internal guideline for staff and Council members. The guidelines outline who is responsible for responding to media inquiries, who reviews coordinated responses, who can be quoted, and how the Council handles recordings during its public meetings. The Committee did not offer any feedback on the Media Guidelines.

The meeting adjourned at 2:45 PM

Meeting Participants

Sean Meehan

Laura Picariello

Nicole Nichols

David Rainer

Dr. J. Marcus Drymon

Charmaine Schmermund

Julie Falgout

Zack Thomas

Gary Graham

Eric Weather, Vice Chair

Dylan Hubbard, Chair

Jeff Weakley

Shelly Krueger

Danica Williams

Council Staff Attendance

Emily Muehlstein

Matt Freeman

Camilla Shireman

Carly Somerset

Carrie Simmons

Council Representative

Dr. Greg Stunz

Bob Gill – In Attendance

Leann Bosarge- In Attendance