

Outreach and Education Technical Committee Report

October 15, 2020

Something's Fishy

Staff gave an overview of the Council's Something's Fishy tool which is used to gather information from fishermen on fish stocks prior to stock assessments. Staff explained the rationale for the tool, the methods used to build and promote the tool, and the outputs produced with the collected data. Staff also shared analytics, using cobia as an example species, and noted that the number of respondents increased dramatically when state agencies cross-promoted opportunities through their own contact lists or social media channels. Staff emphasized that the utility of the tool increases as the number of responses increases.

The Outreach and Education Technical Committee (Committee) recognized the importance of cross-promotion and asked staff to push the members of the Committee to share the tool each time a new Something's Fishy is produced. Committee members also suggested that staff produce a factsheet to highlight how the tool is used. This document should focus on explaining the tool and expressing how responding to the tool will benefit fishermen. The Committee also suggested that the Council should produce a video to highlight a success story related to the tool. Finally, the Committee suggested re-naming the tool, noting that the current name might lead fishermen to believe the tool is soliciting anglers to provide only negative information.

For-Hire Electronic Reporting Outreach

Staff gave a presentation on outreach efforts related to the Southeast For-Hire Electronic Reporting Program. This included a summary of completed efforts to date and current efforts, which include the development of an informational toolkit and instructional videos. Staff sought guidance for future and continued outreach efforts and asked the Committee to specify appropriate audiences and methods for targeting those audiences.

The Committee stressed the importance of continued support for participating anglers as the program begins. Members noted it will be important to share contact information with anglers alongside any outreach materials in case they generate more questions. It was also suggested that Council staff host a video premier with a live question and answer session. The Committee also suggested that staff host targeted webinars for law enforcement, vendors, port agents, internal Council audiences, and the Sea Grant community.

NRDA Fish Descend Project

Staff provided an overview of outreach recommendations made by the Committee at the Release Mortality Symposium held in October 2019. Next, Dr. James Reinhardt from NOAA's Deepwater Horizon Restoration Program gave a presentation on the Descend Project, a \$30 million program that aims to reduce post-release mortality from barotrauma. Dr. Reinhardt explained the current status of the project and asked the Committee for feedback on numerous aspects of the project. Finally, Steve Gilbert from the South Carolina Wildlife Federation presented an overview of a similar project that was completed to reduce bycatch mortality in the snapper/grouper complex of the South Atlantic.

The Committee asked how it could be helpful with the Descend Project moving forward. Dr. Reinhardt said that it would be helpful for the Committee to give feedback on materials that are generated and provide any other recommendations about the work performed.

The Committee mentioned the Florida Friendly Fishing Guide program, which distributes descending devices to involved captains, and includes a module on barotrauma and proper fish handling. The Committee expressed support for focusing efforts on “training the trainers” by heavily targeting captains of 6-pack charter vessels and possibly creating an ambassador program. Another Committee member expressed concern regarding buy-in for headboats and highlighted challenges associated with descending rather than venting in high-volume headboat scenarios.

The Committee also mentioned the importance of producing communications materials that are as clear and convenient as possible. It was noted that there should be a media repository for video clips and photos for journalists to easily amplify communications.

The Committee discussed ways to avoid scenarios where anglers could receive a free descending device without having the intention to use it. They supported the idea of using a tutorial to create a ‘barrier to entry’ while simultaneously creating an opportunity for education. The Committee discussed ways to keep anglers involved after device distribution and stressed the need for a feedback loop between the Descend Project and the fishermen. However, it was noted that a majority of anglers are not highly engaged so, communications should focus on best practices, share the easiest ways to find the right gear, and leave them alone. Typically, anglers go fishing to get away from responsibilities so expectations for repeat engagement should be low unless incentive is provided.

A Committee member noted that certain species, such as gray triggerfish, don’t benefit from use of descending devices as much as other species and that descent success is situational. It was recommended that engagement tools consider the different scenarios and focus on teaching a suite of best practices and equip fishermen with tools to help them make the best decisions based on fishing circumstances.

Gulf Council Communication Analytics

Staff provided an overview of communications analytics for 2020. These analytics showed website use, email listserv, and blog engagement area are tracking with previous years. The Fish Rules mobile recreational app use has increased since previous years. YouTube views are slower this year because the Council has taken less issues to public hearing than normal. Facebook engagement has decreased as staff efforts have focused more on outreach for specific regulatory content and less on generic positive content. Newsletter readership continues on a downward trend despite efforts to reinvigorate the platform. Staff suggested it makes more sense to focus efforts on creating individual blog articles that are more relevant and timelier than the quarterly newsletter. These articles would be published in the Gulf Currents blog and a quarterly digest could be sent out to the Council’s listserv.

The Committee supported the transition away from the newsletter. It reasoned that people live with information overload so they're selective with what they take the time to read, especially during the pandemic. Most people prefer bite-sized information and get their news from social media so the conversion to individual, shorter articles makes sense. The Committee also encouraged staff to revive the Facebook page because it's such an effective tool for angler communications. Finally, the Committee said that transitioning to the Fish Rules Regulations App from the Council app has been an incredible success.

Fish Rules Commercial

Staff announced that the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils are working with the Fish Rules App developer to create Fish Rules Commercial. The interface for this app will populate regulations based on user permits. It is expected to be available after the first quarter of 2021.

Future Outreach and Education Technical Committee Projects

Staff presented a summary of responses gathered from Council, Advisory Panel, and Scientific and Statistical Committee members regarding the effectiveness of the Outreach and Education Technical Committee and future projects that it should consider. Overall, results indicated the Committee was effectively improving awareness and understanding of Council management goals, strategies, activities, and processes; improving public participation in the fishery management process; and improving communications between the public and Council. Survey respondents suggested that the staff and Committee increase our communications efforts to recreational anglers, find ways to reduce user conflicts, increase communications about management success, and the history and future of fisheries management.

The Committee also suggested that it should be important to focus efforts on decreasing conflicts and misunderstandings between different stakeholder sectors. It also noted that it would be helpful to produce communications that explain the economic drivers of the commercial and recreational industries. The Committee suggested that the current calibration issues with the states and transition in data currencies from the Marine Recreational Information Program's Coastal Household Telephone Survey (MRIP-CHTS) to MRIP's Fishing Effort Survey (FES) will be an incredibly important issue to communicate well. Finally, the Committee suggested that Council staff should tackle the depredation issue and encourage boaters not to feed dolphins.

Recreational Data Collection Program Infographics

Staff presented finalized versions of its Recreational Data Collection Infographics which aim to display species, timeline, and methods used, in an easily-digestible visual format, for state and federal fishery-dependent data collection programs. Council staff plans to present these infographics to the Council at an upcoming Council meeting. The infographics will also be included on the Council website in .pdf format in the near future.