



RETURN 'EM RIGHT

Earn Another Fight



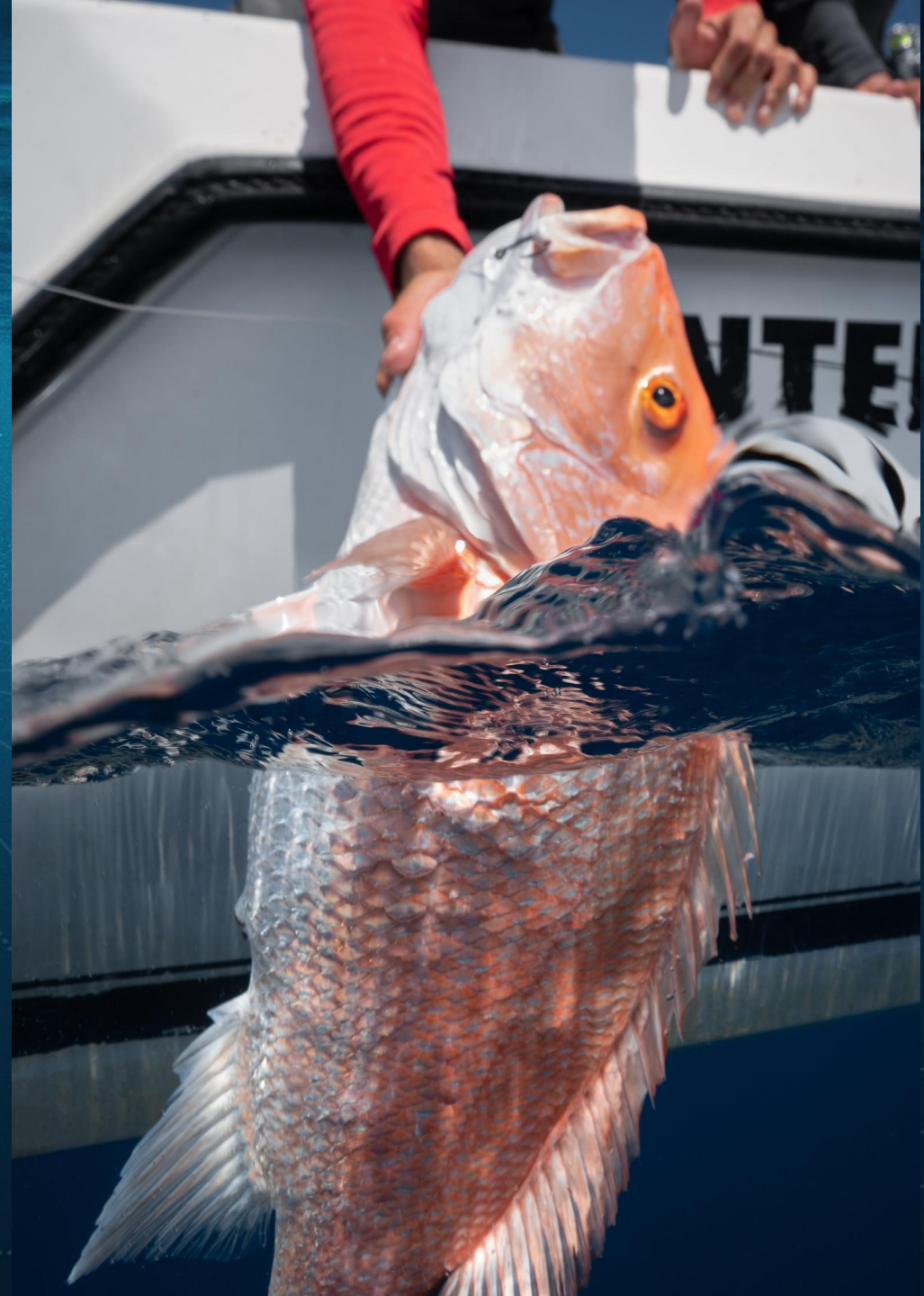
**RETURN 'EM
RIGHT**

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Return 'Em Right

- Duration: 7 years
- Funding: Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill
- Component
 - Education & outreach
 - Fish descending device (FDD) distribution
 - Monitoring & evaluation
- Goals
 - Reduce mortality in reef fish resulting from barotrauma and release
 - Improve angler experiences with release gear
 - Improve the overall health of reef fisheries



Project Plan

- Build an independently branded program that resonates with anglers
 - Guided by anglers, grounded in science
 - Promote best release practices
- Gear distribution
 - Education is prerequisite for gear
 - DESCEND Act
- Phase out distribution by sector
 - Phase 1: Federal for-hire reef fish permit owners, captains and crew
 - Phase 2: All Gulf of Mexico reef fish anglers





RETURN'EM
RIGHT

HOME

BAROTRAUMA

BEST PRACTICES

TAKE ACTION

RESOURCES

ABOUT



Current Status

- Launched phase 1 (Oct. 2021) & phase 2 (May 2022)
- Education module available online
- Gear being distributed across the Gulf

Get Free Gear

Help Reef Fish Survive, Get Free Gear



Who is eligible to receive free gear?

Gulf of Mexico reef fish anglers who fish for [federally managed Gulf of Mexico reef fish](#) like snapper or grouper are eligible to take our online training of best practices and upon completion receive \$100 worth of release gear for FREE. ****One package per person and per household.***

How to review best practices and get free gear?

Follow the steps below to review best practices through our online training:

1. Click the "START TRAINING" button below
2. Enter your information to see if you are eligible for gear
3. Complete the review of best practices
4. Eligible anglers fill out shipping form

[START TRAINING](#)

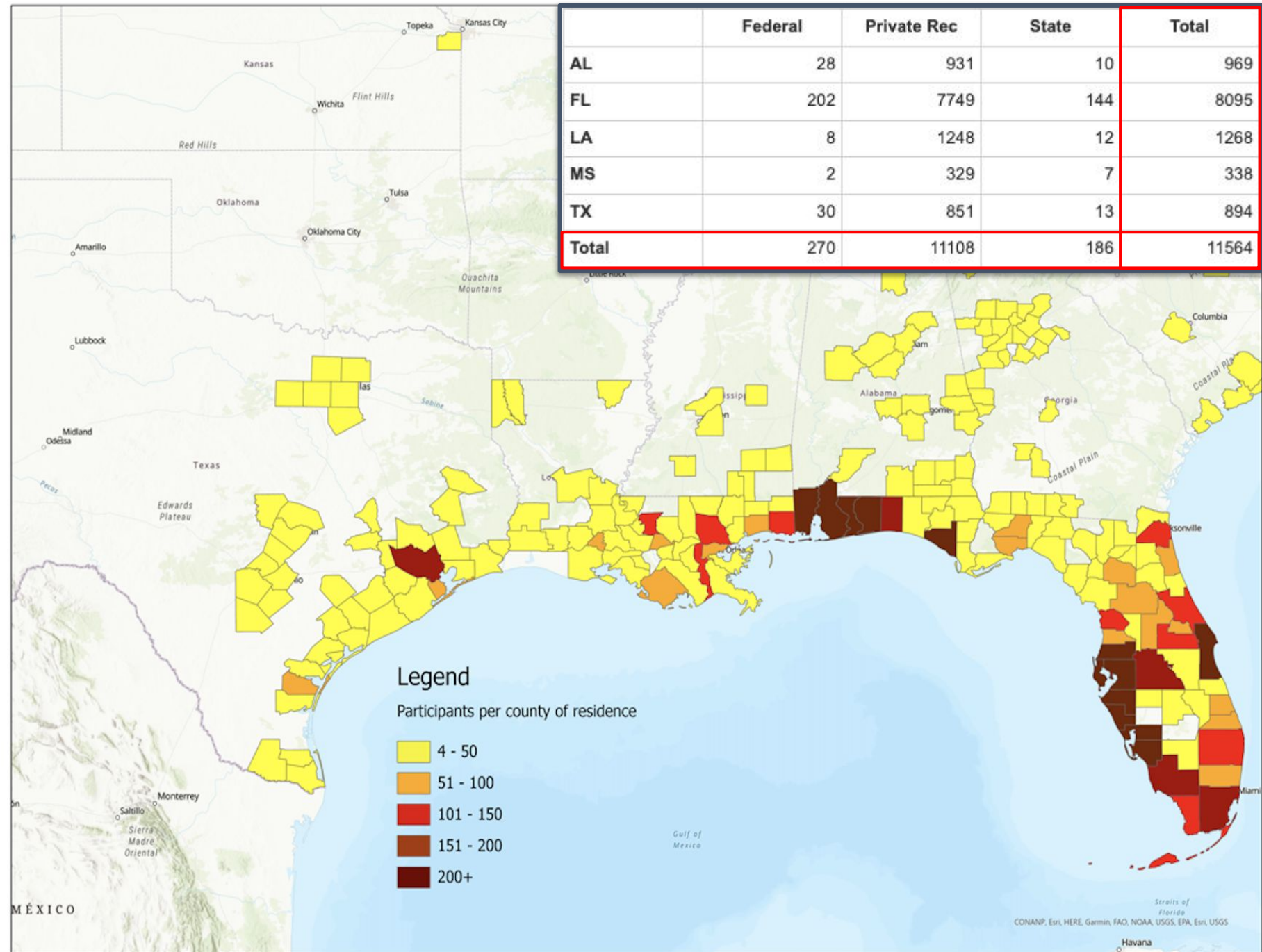
Need more information?

Please visit our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) page about when to expect your free gear, what's included in your package of free gear and more!

Education Module Stats

(*as of 1/18/23)

- 11,564 completions by eligible anglers that reef fish in the GOM
- ~14-minute mean completion time
- 6210 follow-up surveys completed



Density map showing education module completions by eligible anglers by county.

Follow-up Survey Report

(4/22/22-10/31/22)*

• Why did you take this training?

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for reasons why participants completed the training.

Level of agreement with following statement: Scale: strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5)	Mean	St. Dev.	n
I wanted to learn more about best release practices	4.8	0.58	5716
I wanted to receive free gear	4.2	1.03	5711
It was recommended by someone	3.6	1.61	5659
I want to help reef fish survive release and contribute to the future of the sport	5.0	0.28	5728
Other (please specify)			861

Code	#	Example
Conservation	236	"If we do not do our part to help released fish survive there won't be fish for the future."
Learning	164	"The more I learn and refresh myself on barotrauma the better the survival rate of fish."
Recommended	106	"Learned about your program on 'The Hull Truth' boating forum"
Required/open availability	50	"Every offshore fisherman should have to view this presentation."
Gear	40	"Thank you for providing this course and free gear to implement this practice."
Teach/share info	29	"Love fishing and having knowledge to share with other anglers"
Misconception clarified	26	"Been reef fishing all my life and discovered I have been venting wrong. Thanks for the help!"

Survey ID	Why did you participate?
2920	I am all about conserving this precious resource we get to enjoy.
3291	Keeping Florida's reef fish healthy is my main priority.
3421	It is extremely important to ensure maximum survivability of all of our fish.
4859	Family charter in key west..this will help save the reef species..thanks so much
5202	This information changed the way I will fish from now on. I strongly agree with saving fish if possible.
1192	Need to save the resource and prevent waste.
3090	We have started fishing in deeper water in the GOM and have seen more fish experience barotrauma. This is heartbreaking and I want to do anything and everything to prevent it.
182	I have been a gulf offshore fishman for 22 years. There is nothing worse than catching a beautiful red snapper, venting it but then watching it float away on the surface to die. This is very important to me to get this right.
536	Love fishing want to be conservation minded.
710	This helps me learn more about helping fuel my passion for saltwater fish and the ocean.
4201	I am a PhD Fisheries Biologist, and I promote every aspect of taking care of our fisheries.
2484	WE love to fish. I would hate to see a fish that I would have to help because it is an ugly site to see a fish like that.
3148	Thank you for what ya all do! I strongly support this as I love fishing. I love to eat fish but also wish everyone would care more and abide by the rules.
4569	I love to catch fish and anything I can do to increase my chances of catching fish is important.



Follow-up Survey Report

(4/22/22-10/31/22)*

- Was there any specific information you were expecting to see that was not covered?

Code	Count	Percentage	Example
How to	56	17%	"How to set descending device for depth"
FDD	50	15%	"More info about how to rig to a suggested rod and reel setup. Not brands, but possibly styles/pros&cons or different reels/costs"
Venting	47	14%	"More examples of venting and on a few different species of fish"
Species	25	7%	"I was expecting to see how different species react to barotrauma"
Barotrauma	24	7%	"Any explanations of the long-term effects of barotrauma on reef fishes"
Dehooking	24	7%	"Proper dehooker and how to use it"
Survival/Mortality rates	19	6%	"Survival rates for venting versus descender device use. Also, should we do both?"
Depths	17	5%	"Perhaps water depth general guidelines for barotrauma concerns"
Predators	16	5%	"With many predators (dolphins particularly) that hang around boats so much, I like to see more info on how to use these devices to safely to avoid free meals to predators. I did see a question about it on FAQ section. Is there a way?"
Rules/Regs	13	4%	"Parallel safe practice with rules and regs"
Handling fish	9	3%	"When you have to handle the fish, is it better for the fish to use a glove? or should you just wet your hand?"
Hooks	9	3%	"Circle hook removal video"

Code	Count	Percentage	Example
Other devices/tools	9	3%	"How to use descending fish cage"
Weight	6	2%	"Maybe a chart of how much weight may be required to get fish (with average barotrauma) within certain weight/size ranges back down"
Other best practices	4	1%	"When Fishing cut bait do not allow bait to sit idle on bottom, constantly moving bait encourages fish to run which turns circle hook for a lip catch rather than swallowing the bait"
Plan B	4	1%	"What if efforts do not seem successful the first time? Retry something else?"
Questions Module	3	1%	"Would be nice to have more multiple-choice questions for a check on learning should have to answer 80 percent to continue"
Hands on training	1	0%	"Only thing I see that could add to this is actual hands-on training"
Other materials (PDF)	1	0%	"I would like to see a quick cheat sheet included with the device that I can keep with the equipment on my boat. Thanks for the information and working to help save our fish rights"



Follow-up Survey Report

- Did you experience any specific problems with the training? (n=6170)
 - No = 96.5%
 - Yes = 3.5%

Code	#	Example
Great training/program	182	"Great program. Too many fish are lost needlessly. Thank you for your efforts"
Great info	132	"Have been waiting information on this and the training covered all my questions, thank you."
Great presentation	31	"This was an excellent presentation with excellent information."
Great videos	31	"Excellent instructional video and most helpful."
Easy to understand/use	18	"Easy to use and great interactive features."
Concise	11	"This was useful, concise and well-made course."

Code	#	Example
Loading/buffering	37	"Videos did not want to load correctly."
YouTube	29	"One of the videos took me to YouTube, and I could not get back to the course so I had to start over."
Start over	24	"Had to start over several times cause window closed."
Issues with path	24	"Which items to watch and click on."
Device issues	20	"Kicked me out on my cell. Had to do it on my laptop."
User error	17	"Closed the wrong browser but was able to get back. User error."
Content blocked	14	"Two items were blocked by my browser."

Next Steps

- Launch new version of education module
 - Technical issues resolved
 - Added requested information
- Re-targeting captains and crew
- Targeted areas with low participation
- Device use follow-up survey
- Develop new educational videos and modules
- Translate products

Tips and Tricks for Descending Fish:

Please note that each boat/angler may have a different preferred setup



1. **Establish a descending setup that works for you.** Set up a heavy duty rod in the 30-90 degree rod holder. This allows one angler to easily transition a fish to the descending device to be released. Some anglers prefer to use an electric reel or attach their device to a hand line.
2. **Rig your device prior to fishing.** Attach a weight on with a loop knot or swivel to quickly add or remove weight (great for running between spots). One pound of weight will typically descend up to 5-pounds of fish. If using a SeaQualizer, set the depth accordingly based on your fishing depth.
3. **Properly attach your descending device to your catch.** If using a lip grip device, attach it to the lower jaw for a better grip. If using an inverted hook device, look for the same hole the hook made or gently pierce the hook through the soft tissue under the lower jaw.





Monitoring and Evaluation

- At-sea observer programs
- State reef fish validation surveys
- Southeast Region Headboat Survey
- Collaborative studies
- Human dimensions surveys



Gulf At-sea Observer Programs

Who?

- FFWC, ADCNR, & MDMR
- For-hire recreational anglers

What new info is being collected?

- Prevalence of use of FDDs
- Mark-recapture – discard mortality rates
- Standardized barotrauma coding

How it's collected?

- Standardized methodologies and data fields
- For-hire vessels randomly selected each month to be observed





State Reef Fish Validation Surveys

Who?

- FFWC, ADCNR, & MDMR
- *Private* and for-hire recreational anglers

What new info is being collected?

- Whether FDD is on board the vessel
- Total # fish (by spp.) released using FDD
- Average depth fished during trip

How it's collected?

- State Reef Fish Survey (FL), Reef Fish Validation Form (AL), Tails N' Scales Form (MS)
- Dockside interviews


Date _____

MS Snapper Season 2022

Sampler Name _____

Interview Time _____

Interview Number _____

 **MS Snapper Season 2022**

Trip Type

(Federal) For-Hire / State For-Hire / Private)

(circle one)

Enhance • Protect • Conserve

Name of Angler who created trip: _____

Did this angler apply for a Tails n Scales trip number? (YES / NO) number if yes _____

Vessel Number _____ Vessel Name _____

Location / Launch Site _____

Hours Fished (Lines in the water) _____ # of Anglers _____ # Red Snapper Kept _____ # Released _____

Specific Area Fished (Fish Haven 1 2 7 13) (TR) (ST) _____

Did you have a fish descending device or venting tool on board your vessel? DD VT Both None

Were any red snapper were released using a descending device or venting tool? #DD #VT

Marine Patrol Interaction (Y / N) _____ Trip Number Given To MP (Y / N) _____

Reef Fish Validation Form

2 0 2 2 1. Year Month Day 2. Sampler ID 3. County 4. Site 5. Time

6. Vessel Registration or CID # 7. # Anglers 8. Mode () Private () Charter 9. If charter trip, () Single () Multi-Day 10. Trip () Yes () No completed?

11. Was the majority of your fishing effort today.... () 3 miles or less from shore () 3 to 9 miles from shore () more than 9 miles from shore 12. Was the majority of your fishing effort in an artificial reef zone? () Yes () Don't Know () No () Refused 13. Which artificial reef zone did you spend the majority of your fishing effort in? () Nearshore () Dr. Bob Shipp () Hugh Swingle () C.M. Blankenship () Tatum Winn N () Don Kelly () Tatum Winn S () Don't Know () Refused

14. Were reef fish caught during this trip today? () Yes () No (If "No", skip to Q.15.) 15. FDD on board? () Yes () No () Don't Know () Refused All Retained Observed? () Yes () No () Yes () No () Yes () No () Yes () No

Retained # Discarded Dead # Discarded Alive # Descended Alive W/FDD

RSN GRT GAJ



Southeast Region Headboat Survey

Who?

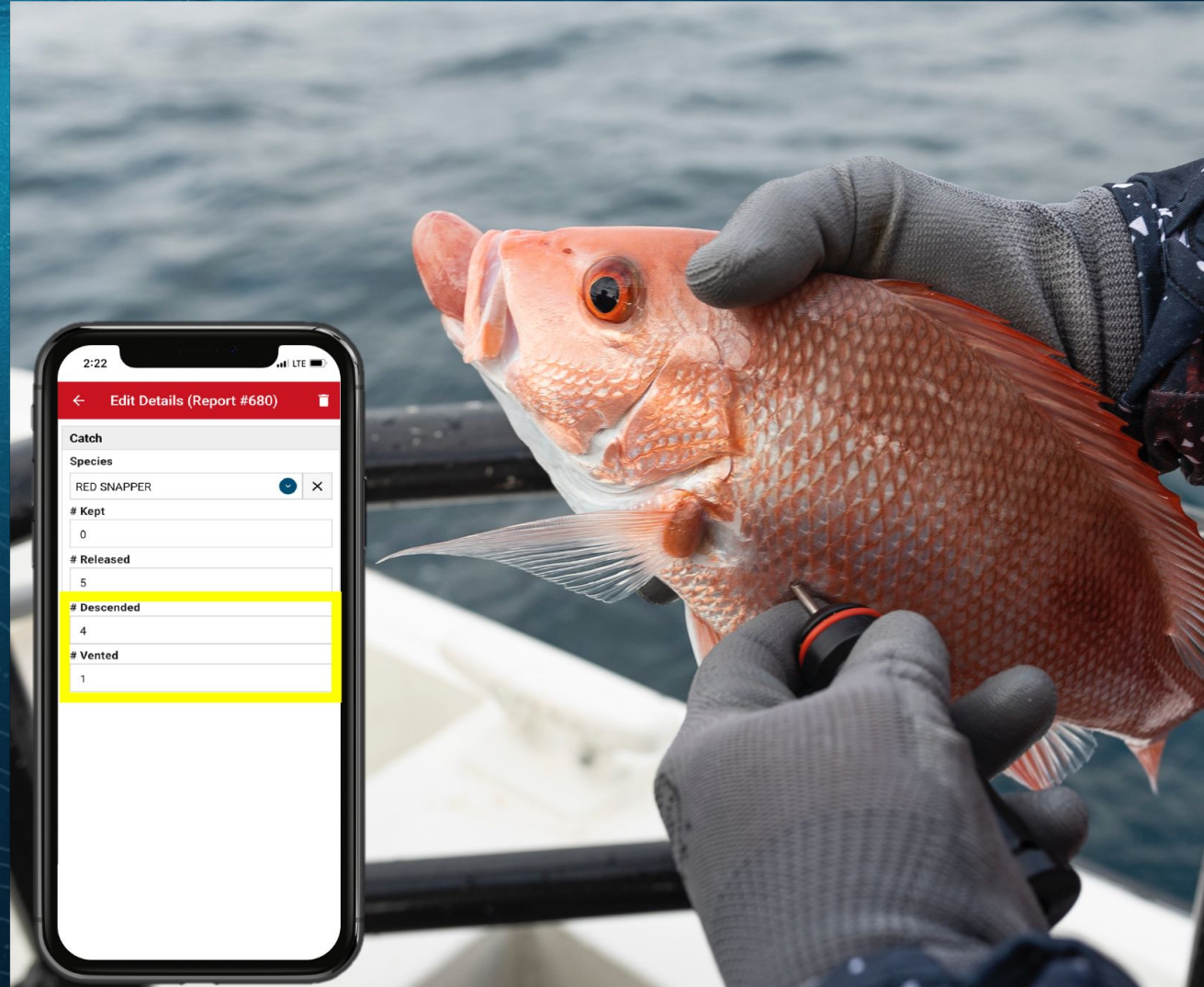
- NOAA
- For-hire headboat fleet

What new info is being collected?

- # Descended
- # Vented

How it's collected?

- eLogbook - VESL
- Self-reported by captains
- Validated using at-sea data





Collaborative Studies

Principal Investigator	Institution	Location	Priorities
Dr. Stephen Szedlmayer	Auburn University	MS/AL coast	Compare release mortality & survival of descended red snapper across depth zones
Dr. Marcus Drymon	Mississippi State University	Gulf-wide	Evaluate depredation rates of released reef fish; depredator ID
Erik Lang	LA Department of Wildlife & Fisheries	LA coast	Compare efficiency of release; characterize depredation; survey anglers' device type preferences
Dr. Will Patterson	University of Florida	West FL Shelf	Estimate seasonal release mortality of descended gag

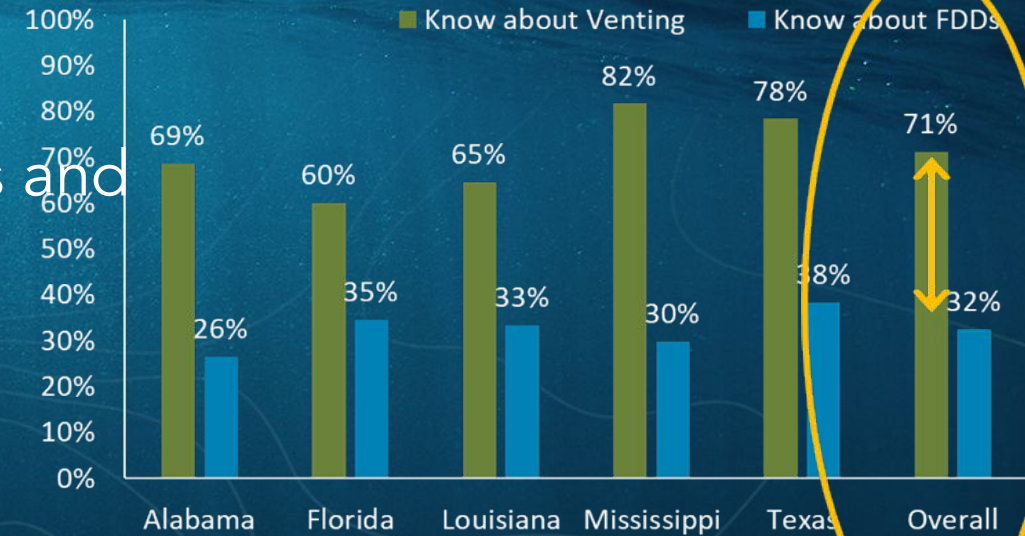


Human Dimensions Survey

- Southwick Assoc. & Gulf states
- Oct-Dec 2021
- Recreational reef angler attitudes, perceptions and use of best fishing practices in Gulf
- Over 4,200 responses

Some interesting results

- Over 90% of anglers recognize at least one symptom of barotrauma
- 71% of private rec anglers aware of venting
 - 11-15% of anglers use a tool that doesn't meet regulations (i.e. fillet knife or ice pick)
- 32% of private rec anglers aware of descending devices, compared to 71% for venting tools



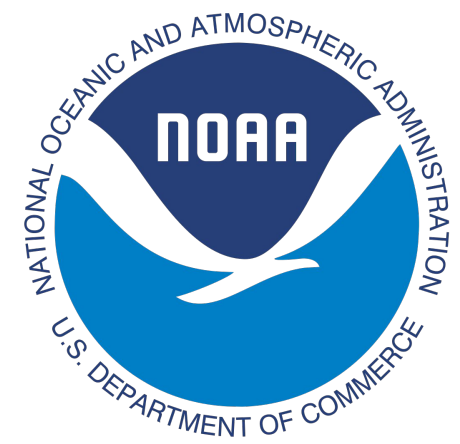


Next Steps - Monitoring

- Receive data sets
- Continue state partnerships
 - At-sea observers
 - Reef fish validation surveys
- Develop Gulf at-sea observer central database
- Make improvements to data collection processes
- Follow up human dimension survey 2024
- Explore opportunities and provide support for outreach and education



CORE PARTNERS



MEDIA PARTNERS

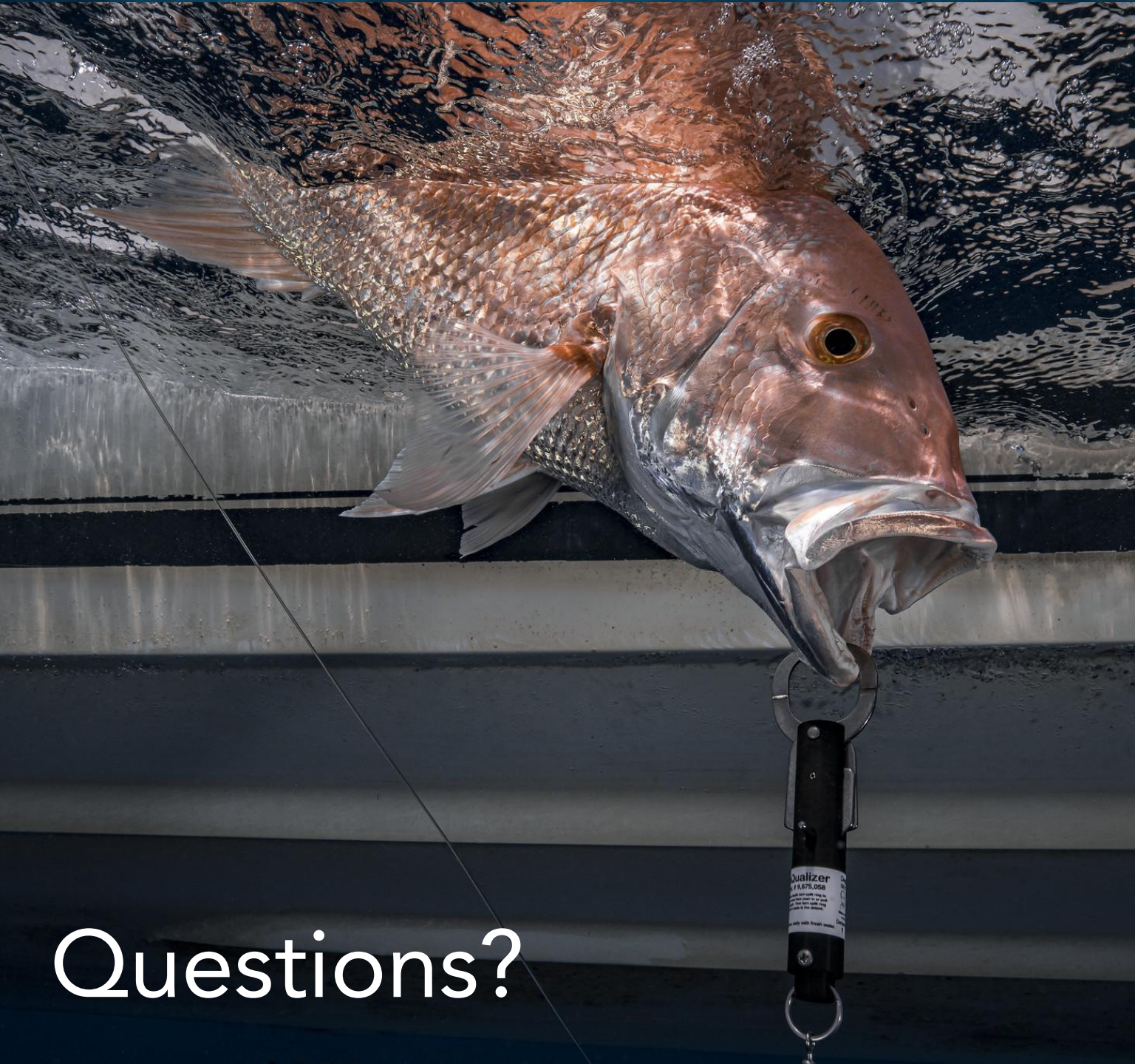


ORGANIZATIONAL PARTNERS



INDUSTRY PARTNERS





Questions?

