

Outreach and Education Committee Report
January 24, 2022
Dr. Greg Stunz, Chair

The Committee adopted the agenda (Tab O, No.1) and approved the minutes (Tab O, No.2) from the January 25, 2021 meeting as written.

Agenda Item IV: Presentation - Communications Analytics and Updated 2021 Communications Improvement Plan (Tab O, No. 4)

Staff provided an overview of communications analytics along with a progress report on the 2021 Communications Improvement Plan. Analytics continue to trend upward across all platforms and staff accomplished nearly all the communications goals set in the 2021 Communications Improvement Plan.

The Committee noted that the Fish Rules App is one of the best communications endeavors that the Council Outreach Team has undertaken. A Committee member asked for a year-by-year comparison of in-app species views at a future meeting. The Committee commended staff for the continued growth of its audience and efforts over the years, and expressed appreciation for the wealth of resources available on the Council website.

Agenda Item V: Social Media Guidelines and Presentation on the Council's Use of Social Media

Staff presented draft guidelines on the Council's use of social media highlighting sections on creating and monitoring posts, and responding to negativity. Staff clarified that these guidelines are intended for internal use but sharing externally may be useful to public stakeholders. A Committee member noted that recent Congressional testimony and inquiry has found that social media algorithms can prioritize negative interactions on their respective platforms. It was also noted that the majority of interactions on the Council Facebook page has been negative in nature. The Committee suggested that staff monitor discussions on negativity in social media and evaluate its use of social media platforms on a regular basis. The Committee inquired about which staff members are allowed to post on Council social media channels; staff clarified that the Public Information Officer, Outreach Specialist, and Communications Assistant were the three staff members with credentials to access Council social media accounts.

Staff then gave a presentation on the Council's use of social media which included an explanation of the benefits of social media. Staff also explained how the algorithm determines the content each user sees on Facebook and Instagram. The presentation highlighted how the algorithm impacts analytics of negative, positive, and educational Council posts. In response to an inquiry from a Committee member regarding preventing the public from commenting on posts, staff explained that turning off the public's ability to comment on Council content would adversely impact the reach and effectiveness of Council social media efforts.

Agenda Item VI: Public Comment Guidelines

Staff presented Draft Public Comment Guidelines which include explanations of how comments are collected, solicited, and reported to the Council. The Committee commented on the value of having a document that outlines public comment processes and noted that combating misinformation on a variety of platforms is time intensive and requires dedicated effort. A Committee member asked staff which social media platforms have the broadest and most effective reach. Staff responded that the Council website is likely the primary application but each platform has its own utility, purpose, and reach for different audiences. Staff also noted that declines in analytics trigger staff to re-evaluate their use of a platform.

Agenda Item VII: Press Release Guidelines

Staff presented draft Press Release Guidelines which include information on the types of press releases published by the Council, the triggers that initiate publication of each release, and the editing process. The Committee offered no discussion or recommendations on the draft guidelines.

Agenda Item VII: 2022 Communications Improvement Plan

Staff presented the draft 2022 Communications Improvement Plan which includes planned improvements for the blog, listserv, social media, Fisherman Feedback Tool, website, and public comment process. Staff also noted its intent to create at least four short educational videos in 2022 and create an interactive, sortable web-based timeline tool that provides management histories for each managed species. Staff also plans to create a web-based storyboard that outlines changes to MRIP and answers frequently asked questions regarding the integration of new estimates into management. The Committee agreed and offered no additional changes to the draft 2022 Communications Improvement Plan.

Agenda Item IX: Remaining Items from the Outreach and Education Technical Committee

The Chairman of the Outreach and Education Technical Committee, Capt. Dylan Hubbard, presented remaining items from the November 2021 Outreach and Technical Committee meeting. He began by reviewing the Technical Committee discussion on how to improve in-person public hearing attendance and make hosting in-person public meetings more cost and time efficient. He explained that the Technical Committee recommends erring on the side of caution and supports hosting meetings even when the analytics don't support the effort because missing opportunities to gather input is worse than hosting meetings with little or no attendance. Capt. Hubbard noted that the Committee expressed support for consideration of hosting 'Listening Sessions' where a local Council member and state agency staff member hosts the public hearing meeting in-person while Council staff participates virtually.

Next, Capt. Hubbard reviewed Return 'Em Right, a project that aims to reduce post-release mortality due to barotrauma. He explained that the Council's Fishing for our Future website could be absorbed by the Return 'Em Right effort and stated the motion made by the Technical Committee which was: *To eliminate the Fishing for Our Future webpage from the Gulf Council*

website by redirecting them to Return 'Em Right. Add the discard dashboard and literature cited to the Fisheries Science pages on the Council website.

Capt. Hubbard discussed the Technical Committee's prioritization of future Council communication topics. The Technical Committee suggested that staff produce a web-based storyboard explaining changes to MRIP and its management implication. A Committee member requested that, in the future, the Technical Committee consider communicating about domestic vs. imported seafood and dietary guidelines related to seafood consumption. Finally, Capt. Hubbard reiterated the Technical Committee discussion on the importance of utilizing hardware/software options that show vote count to improve Council voting transparency.

Agenda Item X: Presentation – Summary of Discard and Barotrauma Reduction Efforts Across the Region

Staff presented a brief overview of four different efforts that are taking place in the Southeast region to minimize discard mortality of reef fish. Return 'Em Right is a Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) and Sea Grant led program that aims to educate anglers on best release practices, distribute descending devices to recreational reef fish fishermen, and research and monitor device use and effectiveness. The DESCEND Act is an Act of Congress that was implemented on January 13, 2022. Finally, the Nature Conservancy's Deck to Depth program aims to promote the use of descending devices across Florida to help snapper and grouper species recover.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.