

**Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
Outreach and Education Technical Committee
Meeting Summary
Tampa, Florida
December 19, 2023**

The meeting of the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) Fishery Management Council's (Council) Outreach and Education Technical Committee (O&E) was convened at 8:30 AM, EST on December 19, 2023. Dr. Max Birdsong, the newest Council staff member was introduced and the recent passing of a long-time NOAA employee and participant in the Council process, Mr. Charlie Bergmann was acknowledged. The agenda for the meeting was adopted and the minutes from the December 6, 2022 meeting were approved as written.

Fishery Ecosystem Plan Outreach

Staff [presented](#) a basic overview of the Council's progress on development of a Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) which included a summary of the conversations that the Ecosystem Technical Committee has had on engaging stakeholders in the broader FEP process and individual Fishery Ecosystem Issues (FEI). Staff stressed the importance of stakeholder contributions to ecosystem-based fishery management efforts and emphasized that it would be crucial to temper expectations of outcomes from the process, because the process is complex and may not always result in timely or direct resolutions to issues within the Council's purview.

The O&E suggested that the Council create an ecosystems webpage and webtool that allows stakeholders to identify new FEI's and submit them to the Council for consideration. It was also suggested that the list of submitters be asked to rank the full list of potential FEI's on an incremental basis before the Council reviews and chooses future FEIs. The O&E advised the Council to include language in the tool to temper expectations by making the public aware of expected timelines, funding limitations, and outcomes of the FEP process.

The O&E agreed that it is not necessary or useful to curate a list of stakeholders that would find relevance across all potential FEI's because stakeholders change constantly; the range of potential FEI's is too broad; and the geographic scope of FEI's varies greatly. The O&E did identify a need to curate FEI specific contacts and create and serve different content to engage audiences (including extra-jurisdictional agencies) and broader general audiences.

Regarding measuring the impact that FEIs have on stakeholders, the O&E thought it would be useful to have a subjective, opinion-based measurement along with a more quantitative metric. A multifaceted approach that couples a measurement of sentiment from stakeholders and a measurement of social and economic impacts should be able to gauge both depth and range of impacts and provide useful information for the FEI ranking process.

In instances when a FEI cannot be addressed with Council action, the O&E thinks that effective communications can become the most useful way to insight positive change. The O&E suggested that the Council leverage the opportunity to show how the Council process works,

which includes an explanation of its limitations. Not all fisheries issues can be addressed with fishing regulations and this shows that the Council is trying to do a better job of managing by looking at the bigger picture and integrating issues that it doesn't manage into the regulatory process.

The O&E also noted that the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC) Snook Symposiums could serve as an example of how to address issues without regulations. Those efforts have garnered a lot of respect from the public because they give people comfort and build confidence in the agency when issues are addressed holistically. The O&E also noted that the Council's Release Mortality Symposium is a good blueprint for addressing issues without changing regulations because it resulted in future work through the development of Return 'Em Right. In the case of red tide, the O&E suggests that the Council host a symposium to bring together a range of affected stakeholders, extra-jurisdictional agencies, and other groups that have a stake in red tide impacts to collaboratively address the issue in a holistic manner. Also, since there are many existing groups who address red tide, it was suggested that the Council develop products showing the social, biological, and economic impacts that red tide has on federal fisheries and share them with appropriate groups on a reoccurring basis.

Finally, during the evaluation process, the O&E suggested that the Council request feedback on how each FEI was addressed by asking its most engaged stakeholder groups to gather input from their constituents. It was also noted that the running list of FEI's gathered through the webtool could be an important barometer gauging what issues remain consistent and what issues are more intermittent.

Coastal Migratory Pelagics (CMP) Stakeholder Engagement

Staff [presented](#) the O&E with a background on the South Atlantic Council's Coastal Migratory Pelagics Port Meeting effort and resulting Gulf Council directive to develop a complimentary effort. The O&E concurred that in-person, boots-on-the-ground efforts have not provided a great return on investment for mackerel-based issues in the past and therefore should not be the focus of this effort. It was also cautioned that unless dramatic management changes are anticipated, a big undertaking to gather input is not necessary. It was noted that if the goal is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the stock across its range, then the stock in Mexico would also need to be considered.

The O&E suggested a multifaceted approach to gathering feedback on CMP species that includes a survey tool, virtual meetings, and gathering direct feedback from various Council Advisory Panels. The O&E would like the Council to develop a web-based feedback tool that either fits within the constraints of the Paperwork Reduction Act or can be conducted by Sea Grant across the region to gather information from CMP fishermen. The O&E also suggested that a few virtual meetings should be held to gather information directly from stakeholders. Both of those efforts should be advertised broadly and targeted communications should drive tournament anglers, commercial and charter CMP fishermen, and niche CMP fishing groups like the Alabama and Florida Keys' gillnetters to the tool and the virtual sessions. The O&E did discuss the appropriateness of using the Council meetings as venues for in-person sessions and

advised that since the Council meeting audience is consistent, and likely won't bring in new people, using the meetings to drive people to the tool and the virtual hearings is appropriate, but hosting in-person sessions concurrently with Council meetings is not beneficial. The O&E did suggest that the Council take advantage of its various Advisory Panels and conduct sessions, modeled on the South Atlantic's Fishery Performance Reports, to gather CMP feedback.

Recreational Initiative Outreach

Staff [presented](#) a brief background on the Council's Recreational Initiative and asked the O&E to help identify when and how it is appropriate to begin publicly discussing this effort to balance the quality and quantity of participation. The O&E applauded the Council for this undertaking and suggested that it was too early to begin communicating publicly about the effort. The O&E advised the Council to hold communications until early summer just before it advertises for Working Group members.

Communications Guidelines Booklet

Staff presented a [draft of the Council Communications Guidelines booklet](#) and asked for feedback and recommendations for how to improve the document. Members of the O&E noted that the social media guidelines have been useful for multiple agencies who have since developed their own guidelines documents using the Council's as a starting point. The O&E suggested that staff add a section on in-person engagement events, expand the public comment guidelines by adding all types of Advisory Panel meetings, and improve navigation in the document by adding a 'back to top' option to the online version.

Illegal Sale of Recreationally Caught Fish

Staff [presented](#) the O&E with a brief background on the Council's concerns regarding the illegal sale of recreationally caught fish. There was not consensus from the O&E on whether the issue was prevalent or not. It was noted that headboat customers are frequently asked to sell their catch or barter their fish in exchange for a free meal at a restaurant. It was also noted that there may be an issue with HMS species and swordfish specifically.

The O&E suggested that a note be added in FishRules under cobia to clarify the state restrictions on sale of recreationally caught fish. It was also suggested that reminders be added to any cobia-based press releases or news. The O&E asked staff to coordinate an informal social media campaign to remind people of the regulations with HMS and O&E members.

Management Timeline Tool

Staff presented the O&E with a first draft of its new interactive, web-based [Management Timeline Tool](#) which uses gag grouper and greater amberjack as pilot species. The O&E noted that the tool would be great for new Council members and members of the public who were looking to better understand the history of management changes by species. The O&E discussed whether the link to the Federal Register Notices was useful and wondered if there was something more important that could be displayed in that area. The O&E struggled with navigating and zooming on the timeline efficiently. The O&E suggested that in the future, ArcGIS Story Maps could be created using the data in a narrative way and suggested that future

improvements could include adding science and stock assessment information, adding Council rationale for changes, adding a walk-through for new users, and adding a search bar. Ultimately, the O&E approved continued development of the tool and looked forward to seeing more species added.

2023 In-Person Outreach Progress and 2024 Plan

Council staff provided a [presentation](#) on the 2023 outreach goals and accomplishments along with 2024 in-person outreach ideas. Staff reminded the O&E of their recommendations on event types and in-person outreach strategies for 2023 and requested similar feedback for 2024. Several specific events were suggested by O&E members including: Celebrate the Gulf Outreach and Education Festival, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources Marine Discovery Day, Alabama Discovery Day, the Biloxi Boat Show, Mobile Boat Show, the Faux Pas Tournament in Louisiana, and the Houston Boat Show. O&E members were agreeable with returning to certain events such as the Louisiana Fisheries Forward Summit because it focuses on commercial fisheries, and iCAST because several other agencies participate and it allows access to industry leaders.

The O&E discussed balancing events that may provide more reach to a high number of people with events that allow more one-on-one participation through local club meetings or seminar series. The O&E agreed that continuing to track analytics such as number of individual engagements and listserv signups is important, but quantitative metrics do not always measure how valuable an event is qualitatively. They expressed interest in having staff find events that engage a broad cross-section of stakeholders in all sectors and suggested partnering with and working with other state and federal agencies to expand Council reach. It was noted that a Council member should attend each in-person outreach event to allow stakeholders direct access to Council members. It was also suggested to attempt scheduling events in a manner that best utilizes Council staff time and money. Another committee member suggested using quantitative metrics to help choose events, such as a minimum number of people in attendance for a seminar or a certain number of individual engagements per day. O&E members offered to provide Council outreach materials at events they attend, if Council staff cannot attend in person. Council staff will present the information provided by the Outreach and Education Technical Committee in a 2024 Outreach Event Plan at the January Council meeting.

2023 Communications Improvement Plan Progress and 2023 Analytics

Staff gave a [presentation](#) on the progress made on the [2023 Communications Analytics Improvement Plan](#) and the 2023 Communications Analytics. The following is a summary of items discussed:

Website – Staff added more information to the website on the responsibility of AP/SSC membership, improved the homepage slideshow, created a one-stop shop for angler resources, and integrated the Fish Rules API into the regulations pages. Website analytics for the first quarter were lost during the transition to the new Google analytics platform. Additionally, the mechanisms used to measure website traffic were updated and Google analytics dropped about 30%, a trend seen across the spectrum for all

websites measured using google analytics. Federal fishing regulations remain the most used portion of the website with Council meeting materials and blog posts ranked the next highest, respectively.

Video- Staff updated the AP Orientation video and began creating and posting 'reels' on Meta platforms and 'shorts' on YouTube. Regular video analytics remain strong and short format videos are creating a huge return on investment.

Social Media- Staff endeavored to regularly post nudges to join the press release listserv, helpful content driving people to Council materials, and positive content. Analytics remain strong for Facebook and continue to grow steadily for Instagram.

Blog- Staff published six blog articles in the first three quarters of 2023 and sent out two blog article digests. Staff found a way to track total blog page views across all articles and enumerate views of individual articles at the end of the third quarter. While analytics are not available for 2023, they will be beginning in 2024 and as a proxy, the three most popular blog articles earned over 10,000 reads in 2023.

Email Listserv- Staff sent out 76 press releases in the first three quarters of 2023 and subscribership increased by nearly 500 people. The most interesting analytic is the 46% open rate, or the percentage emails sent that are read, which far surpasses the average open rate for non-profit organizations of 28.59%.

Fish Rules Apps- Recreational and Commercial Fish Rules analytics continue to show the highest volume of users across all Council communication platforms.

2024 Communications Improvement Plan Ideas

Staff explained that it was working on creating the 2024 Communications Improvement Plan and asked the O&E to brainstorm ideas using the Google Jamboard tool. The O&E was first asked to identify how the communications team can improve their function in each of the current communication strategies: Next, the O&E was asked to identify any new communication methods. Then, the O&E was asked to identify general things that should be changed about Council communications and general things that are working particularly well with Council communications. Finally, the O&E was asked if there were any communications endeavors that could be discontinued.

The O&E suggested that staff continue to produce short-format videos and publish 'live' videos. The O&E suggested continued fish identification blog articles and articles on how fishery science and management works. The O&E also suggested that fishery facts be updated on the website and fishery-independent monitoring information be added to the Fish Science page. The O&E suggested we focus more on virtual rather than in-person public outreach and that we work with state agencies to select the best in-person outreach events. The O&E suggested we enhance our function on Fishbrain and seriously consider whether direct mail-outs are useful. Results of this session are located in Appendix A and will be directly incorporated into the 2024

Communicants Improvement plan.

Other Business

The O&E discussed outreach for the future for-hire reporting program. It was stated that the previous program failed because of gaps in outreach and implementation. There was confusion about the inclusion of vessel monitoring systems and the economic questions included in the trip report. A member of the O&E suggested that the program may not have failed if the outreach was better, so the O&E should take on a much larger role to communicate the new program as it is developed.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00pm EST.

Appendix A: 2024 Communications Improvement Plan Brainstorm

How can we improve?

Social Media

- LIVE VIDEOS
- Council Staff highlight-Video
- Stick with media that has the largest number of contacts
- Continued reels.
- Communicate with states on joint topics that could be shared on social media to amplify reach

Listserv/Press Release Content

I think Emily should release a (tearful) obituary on the death of jamboards

Public Hearings

FOCUS ON VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Blog

- KEEP UP GOOD WORK
- HOW FISHERY SCIENCE & MGMT WORKS - MREP STYLE BLOG SERIES (DIGEST)
- Fish Id seems to be working well. We will share more on our end.

Website

- ADD NEW TOOL TO WEBSITE
- ADD FIM to fisheries science page
- UPDATE FISHERY FACTS SHEET
- Council Staff highlight-Video

In-Person Outreach

- Most valuable and great idea to schedule with council meetings to save cost
- GET BOOTH AT ICAST
- In person - work with state agency, Sea Grant, area council member and other groups (CCA, Charter Boat Association...) and combine efforts

Suggest new communications methods/projects that we should undertake

- Fishbrain page enhancements
- LIVE VIDEO STREAMS FOR LONGER FORM VIDEOS
- Are you cross promoting posts on different social media platforms?
- Florida numbers are very high on Fish Rules, wonder why not other states?
- cause FL is BEST

Anything general we should change about Council Communications?

WORK WITH NOAA ON COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Anything working particularly well with Council Communications?

The bait fish blog was great - what can I use for bait?

REMINDING O&E TEAM TO AMPLIFY MESSAGES, BLOGS, ETC

Your reminders for us to share are perfect.

Encourage to continue to be diverse in platform and methods. One size does not fit all

Is there anything we're doing that we can discontinue??

Direct mailings....if this is still a thing??