

## **SAFMC Staff Report September 2022**

### **Orientations**

Council staff held an in-person New Council Member Orientation at the Council office on August 17, 2022. An Advisory Panel Orientation was held via webinar on August 18th for newly appointed AP members. Both received positive feedback from participants.

### **Council Coordination Committee**

The Council Coordination Committee will meet October 18-20, 2022 in the Washington, D.C. area (exact location TBD). This meeting will be hosted by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS).

### **American Fisheries Advisory Panel**

NOAA Fisheries recently announced the call for applications for the new American Fisheries Advisory Committee to make recommendations for Saltonstall-Kennedy priorities and grant award funding. The committee will consist of 22-members with three representatives from each of six regions. Members will represent seafood sectors, including processors, recreational and commercial fishermen and seafood farmers, fisheries scientists, and regional fishery management council members. Additionally, there will be four at-large members, including one representative each from the retail and marketing sector, commercial fisheries, recreational fisheries, and NOAA Fisheries.

### **Rule to Amend the North Atlantic Right Whale Vessel Speed Regulations**

NMFS Office of Protected Resources is proposing changes to the North Atlantic right whale (NARW) vessel speed rule to reduce the likelihood of lethal vessel collisions. The changes would broaden the spatial boundaries and timing of current speed restrictions, including those that exist in south Atlantic during calving season. The rule would also expand mandatory speed restrictions of 10 knots or less to include most vessels 35–65 feet in length. The Council will receive a brief presentation on the proposed rule. Additionally, staff will present draft comments for the Council to discuss during the meeting.

### **Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Restoration Blueprint**

Sanctuary representatives will deliver a presentation to the Council during the September 21, 2022 webinar.

### **Western Central Atlantic Fisheries Commission (WECAFC) Meeting**

Staff attended the 18th meeting of the Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC), which took place 26-29 July 2022. The meeting was held virtually under the leadership of the U.S. Chair, Deirdre Warner-Kramer (State Department, Office of Marine Conservation, and SAFMC member).

WECAFC operates as a regional fisheries body under Article VI of the FAO Constitution and acts in an advisory capacity to promote the effective conservation, management, and development of living marine resources in the Wider Caribbean. It has 34 members, including the United States, and aims to meet on a biennial basis. There are 11 working groups with specific terms of reference. Fishery scientists, experts, and managers participate in the working groups through the representation of their member countries. Relevant regional and sub-regional organizations are also represented upon invitation.

The U.S. delegation was led by Carolyn Gruber (State Department, Office of Marine Conservation), with participation of staff from the NOAA Fisheries Office of International Affairs, Trade, and Commerce; NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office; Caribbean Fishery Management Council; Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council; South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Myra Brouwer); and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

The Commission addressed several topics and endorsed several important non-binding documents and recommendations. Of relevance to the Council's activities were the adoption of a new Strategic Plan for 2022-2027 and a comprehensive Work Program for 2022-2024. At the request of the United States, the work program was amended to include a meeting of the Flyingfish-Dolphinfish Working Group and the Recreational Fisheries Working Group. The Commission agreed at its last meeting – as a result of a U.S. recommendation – that the Flyingfish Working Group should be broadened to look at dolphinfish and other pelagic species that are not managed by ICCAT. The working group was unable to meet prior to WECAFC18, but a meeting is tentatively scheduled for 2023. A presentation will be delivered to the Council by WECAFC representatives during the September 21, 2022 webinar.

The Commission only briefly discussed the possible transformation of WECAFC towards becoming a strengthened regional fishery entity or arrangement with binding management authority. In 2019, the Commission endorsed a roadmap for a member-driven and inclusive process to advance the development of a model for a regional fisheries management entity or arrangement in the WECAFC area but intersessional progress during the pandemic was limited. For more information: <https://www.fao.org/wecafc/en/>

### **NOAA Fisheries Draft Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy**

In response to Executive Orders 13985 (Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government) and 14008 (Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad) the NMFS developed a Draft Equity and Environmental Justice (EEJ) Strategy. The Draft Strategy aims to create a framework to advance EEJ, including representation, equal treatment, and environmental benefits for all people and communities. Council staff drafted comments on the Draft Strategy that were review by Council leadership and submitted to the agency. Comments noted current Council efforts related to gathering public input for use in the management process and the opportunities for engagement in research through the Citizen Science program. Additionally, the letter reiterated the importance of EEJ to

the South Atlantic region and recommended the agency ensure sufficient funding was made available to support EEJ efforts and the agency staff work closely with Council staff and state partner in the development of regional EEJ implementation plans.

### **Draft guidance on mitigating potential impacts of offshore wind development on commercial and recreational fishing**

Coordinating through the Wind Sub-group of the CCC Habitat Workgroup, staff assisted with drafting and submitting a comment letter from the Executive Directors of the New England, Mid-Atlantic, and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils addressing the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM)'s draft guidance on mitigating potential impacts of offshore wind development on commercial and recreational fishing. The public comment period closed on August 22, 2022.

### **Citizen Science**

The Citizen Science Program has had a busy summer. Key efforts are highlighted below focusing on activities that have occurred since the June Council meeting.

- The new Citizen Science Program Coordinator, Meg Withers, started with the Council in late June 2022. Meg will be working on a variety of citizen science activities, but her primary focus will be coordinating the SAFMC Release project.
- Data collection and recruitment and retention efforts continued for the SAFMC Release project. Recent outreach efforts are highlighted in the 'Outreach' section below.
- Staff presented findings from the FISHstory citizen science project as part of the Council's seminar series in August 2022. A recording of the seminar is available at the following link: <https://safmc.net/events/seminar-series-fishstory-using-citizen-science-to-describe-historic-catches/>.
- Staff, in collaboration with colleagues from North Carolina State University and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, submitted a proposal to ACCSP in August 2022 to continue and expand the FISHstory project.
- Coordination continues with NOAA colleagues to curate a special issue of the American Fisheries Society's Fisheries magazine focused on using citizen science and other non-traditional data sources in fisheries management. Staff co-authored an introductory article and authored an article on the development of the FISHstory project that have been accepted for inclusion in the special issue which will be available later this fall.
- The Program received a three-year grant for the SMILE citizen science project which partners with the Reef Environmental Education Foundation (REEF) and the Southeast Coastal Ocean Observing Regional Association (SECOORA). The project will develop and test a handheld stereo camera that recreational divers can use to collect length information which will be incorporated into REEF's Volunteer Fish Survey Project. The length data collected through this project can inform stock assessments, ecosystem-based assessments, and coral restoration monitoring.
- Staff helped coordinate two symposia at the [2022 American Fisheries Society annual meeting](#): 'Growing Fisheries Research and Management Through Angler Engagement' and 'Challenges and Solutions for Citizen Science in Fisheries'.

## **International Convention of Allied Sportfishing Trades (ICAST) 2022**

Council staff participated in [ICAST 2022](#) in July. The world’s largest recreational fishing trade show, ICAST is held Orlando, Florida each year and open to wholesale and retail dealers. The Council’s 10’ X 20’ booth was part of the convention’s “Conservation Corner” and focused on raising awareness of best fishing practices, the Citizen Science Program, and ways to become involved in the Council process. Overall, the event was incredibly successful. There was a steady stream of people entering the booth and asking questions about BFPs and Citizen Science. ICAST also offers opportunities for staff to participate in learning seminars, panel discussions, and network with manufacturers and others involved in recreational fishing.



Staff worked with other exhibitors in the Conservation Corner to coordinate and host the special event “Donuts and Descending.” Free donuts and coffee were made available through Conservation Corner partners and the importance of best fishing practices, specifically descending devices were discussed with attendees. The morning event was well attended, and we anticipate coordinating similar events at future ICAST conventions. Other exhibitors in the Conservation Corner include FWC, SCDNR, USFWS, Mote Marine Lab, NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries, The Nature Conservancy, and Return ‘Em Right.

## **Best Fishing Practices and Citizen Science Outreach**

Best Fishing Practices and Citizen Science staff traveled to the Outer Banks, North Carolina to visit tackle shops and distribute outreach materials. Staff also took a charter trip with Good Times Sportfishing run by Snapper Grouper Advisory Panel member, Captain Andy Piland. Staff from NC Sea Grant and NC Division of Marine Fisheries were also on board, as well as two local writers. Despite rough conditions, staff was able demonstrate how utilizing a descending device can improve the survival of released fish suffering from barotrauma. Staff was also able to demonstrate use of the SAFMC Release application and how submitted information may be used by scientists and managers. Staff will also be participating in SCDNR’s Charter Summit

meetings in late August 2022 to share information on the best fishing practices campaign and the SAFMC Release project with South Carolina charter captains.

### **Website and Digital Communications Updates**

- Fishery Performance Reports available on the main [Fishery Management](#) page.
- Added FMP Goals and Objectives for [CMP](#), [Snapper Grouper](#), and [Dolphin Wahoo](#) to their respective FMP parent pages. Other FMP Goals and Objectives to come along with more descriptive individual amendment pages.
- Switched DNS providers from Network Solutions to Gandi to resolve the issue of users being blocked from entering the site.
- Pursuing the implementation of a new Google based public comment tool.
  - Goal is to have it live on the website before the December Council meeting.
  - Will be easier for Council members to access and read comments, allowing them to sort and organize based on location, comment topic, etc.
  - Will save time for technical staff when sorting through and analyzing comments.
  - Is more aesthetically pleasing, organized, and user friendly for public accessibility.
- Currently working on managed area pages with embedded maps.
- Social media outreach responsibilities established, and plan developed.
- New method for displaying AP locations and affiliations.