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THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

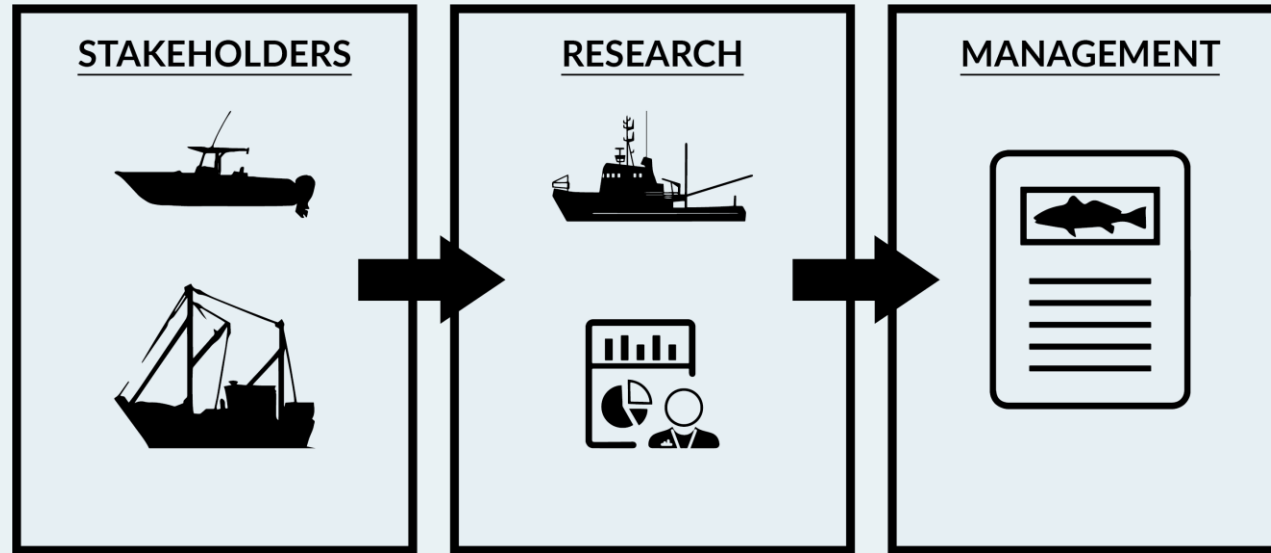
Sea Grant Reef Fish Extension and Communication Fellowship: Successes, Lessons, and the Future

**Outreach and Communications Advisory Panel
May 2026**



Extending Our Reach: A Regional Reef Fish Collaborative

Multi-Sea Grant extension team covering the Gulf and South Atlantic regions.
PI: Dr. Marcus Drymon, Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant



Purpose: To build upon the conventional unidirectional flow of information (i.e., from research to management to stakeholder) by working directly with stakeholders on a consistent basis to identify pressing research needs and communicate those needs to the scientific and management community (i.e., from stakeholder to research and management). .



South Atlantic Reef Fish Fellowship



- Included funding for four, one-year, fellowships.
- Fellow served as a liaison between the South Atlantic Regional Sea Grant Offices and the South Atlantic Council.
- Supported outreach and communication efforts for snapper grouper species (reef fish) through the region.



The Fellowship Team

Scott Baker (NC Sea Grant)

Jocelyn Juliano, Matt Gorstein (SC Sea Grant)

Bryan Fluech (GA Sea Grant)

Angela Collins (FL Sea Grant)

Christina Curtis (SAFMC)

Reef Fish Fellowship Focus



- Assist with Council outreach programming related to best fishing practices, including tackle shop visits, media and content creation, seminars, and industry events.
- Facilitate communication between the South Atlantic Council, South Atlantic Regional Sea Grants, and fishery stakeholders throughout the region.
- Participate in outreach activities related to Greater Amberjack and Red Snapper Research Programs.
- Attend regional meetings to discuss and plan outreach strategies with partner Sea Grants and stakeholders.



**So, it's been four years.
How did the Fellowship go?**

Four Fellows



Ashley Oliver

David Hugo

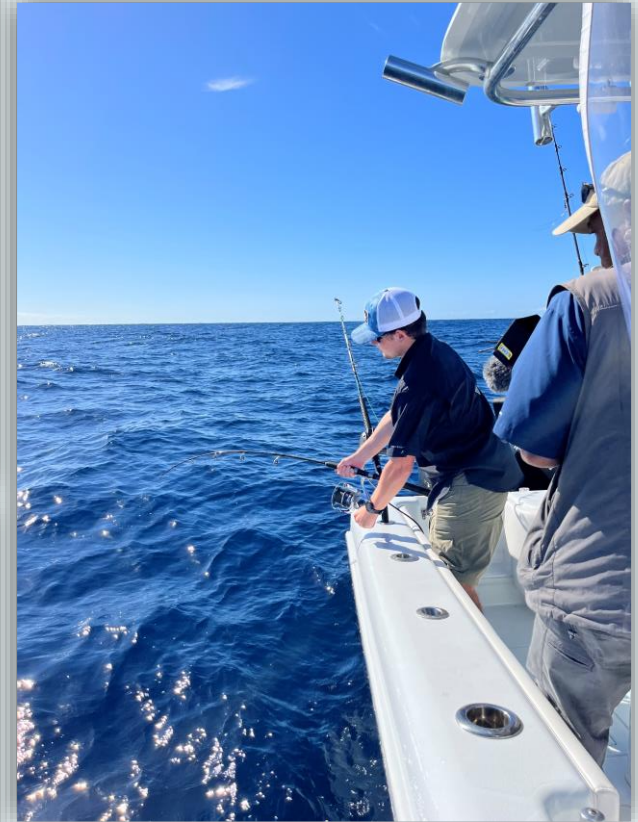


Grayson Webb

Ryan McMullen



Multiple Media Trips



Published Articles



C O N S

From Hook To A Differ

By Greyson Webb

Your odds of success on the water can hinge on meeting size requirements to being caught on

While released fish can go on to survive and

NEWS STORY

Making It Habit: Descending Devices and Best Fishing Practices to Mitigate Barotrauma

Dec 5, 2023

By Erica Hussey, S.C. Sea Grant Consortium

"The hurricane should have churned up good things," says Captain Chuck Griffin, as he steers an AmeraCat 27 that effortlessly glides across the water. Departing from the Isles of Palms Marina, the boat picks up speed. A pod of dolphins passes in the periphery, one spyhops and another descends offering a fleeting view of its dorsal fin.

It's early morning, with just a hint of a low rising sun. Hurricane Idalia is headed northeast. Everything points to the perfect weather opening for an offshore charter trip. David Hugo the Sea Grant Reef Fish Fellow; Ashley Oliver the Best Fishing Practices Outreach Specialist; and Julia Byrd the Citizen Science Program Manager all from the [South Atlantic Fishery Management Council \(SAFMC\)](#) are hoping for reef fish.

Everything is prepared. The boat has been wiped down, chrome

The F/V Sea Spirit: Honoring the Past, Sustaining the Future

By Greyson Webb

Through storms and calm seas, shifting tides and changing times, one thing has remained steadfast in the waters of Ponce Inlet, Florida for nearly 50 years: the F/V Sea Spirit.

Handcrafted at Sea Love Marina in 1977, this 65-foot vessel was among the first headboats to operate out of Ponce Inlet. Today, the Sea Spirit stands as the last active headboat in the greater Volusia County area and the longest running headboat in northeastern Florida.

Despite switching ownership in 2024, the Sea Spirit continues to run out of its home marina in Ponce Inlet. New owners, Capt. Nic Stephens and his wife, Haley Stephens, intend to keep it that way.

"We almost felt there's an obligation to keep this boat here," Haley said. "It's not my boat. It's our boat. This boat belongs to the community. It belongs to the long line of men who've been there at that helm and the

g part of their lives. Our history lives on in

t, Capt. Nic has his captain's license in C. has amassed over n owner, he said the ard and the vessel's

ow, I wouldn't do it

erving the legacy of and Haley Stephens ty instructions and ined that they also

ndling and releasing ons. Explaining that if that his crew uses prove a fish's chance

handling fish with ks to minimize the igns of barotrauma. are brought to the n to return to their g devices, such as



inverted hooks, lip clamps or weighted crates, or through venting.

Beyond incorporating these best fishing practices into the Sea Spirit's operations, Haley said they are working hard to promote best fishing practices at a grassroots level by hosting seminars, participating in workshops and sharing information on their social media.

"I think when you have the opportunity to set that tone, it just lays the foundation for a successful, healthy fishery," Haley said.

Championing best fishing practices through education and example Capt. Nic and Haley Stephens are helping to protect and sustain the fisheries that keep the Sea Spirit running—for their community today and for the anglers of tomorrow. For the Stephens family, their work extends beyond the waters they navigate.

As Haley put it, "We're not in the fishing business. We're in the people business."

To learn more about the Sea Spirit and the trips they offer, contact Haley Stephens at fvseaspirit@gmail.com.

To learn more about best fishing practices, contact Greyson Webb Sea Grant's Reef Fish Extension Fellow, at greyson.webb@safmc.net.

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Winter 2022

An Angler-Inspired Approach: How Descending Devices Can Save North Carolina's Reef Fish

To reduce barotrauma and increase rates of survival during catch and release, descending devices are now required on all vessels targeting snapper and grouper in the Southeast.

December 9, 2022 | Dan DiNicola | 8-min. read

Fishing

THESE ANGLING PRACTICES ARE VITAL TO A PRESSURED CATCH-AND-RELEASE FISHERY

By Contributed · March 22, 2024



An angler demonstrates proper handling practices with a juvenile graysby grouper. ASHLEY OLIVER/Contributed

Fish are under pressure — a lot of it.

Lots of Industry Events and Presentations



Two Successful Seminar Series



REEF FISH WEBINAR SERIES

Tune in to this **three-part webinar series** to learn about **Reef Fish Surveying**, the **South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Program**, and the **Greater Amberjack Count**. Each interactive webinar will include a **guest presentation** by lead researchers followed by a question and answer session. Please see below for event details and webinar registration.

2024 Webinar Schedule

- January 30th at 6:00 pm EST
 - **Reef Fish Surveying**
- February 13th at 6:00 pm EST
 - **South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Program**
- February 27th at 6:00 pm EST
 - **Greater Amberjack Count**

 [Register here!](#)







REEF FISH SURVEYING

Dr. Walter Bubley
*South Carolina Department
of Natural Resources*



SOUTH ATLANTIC RED SNAPPER RESEARCH PROGRAM

Dr. Will Patterson
University of Florida



GREATER AMBERJACK COUNT

Dr. Sean Powers
Dr. Mark Albins
University of South Alabama


FLORIDA • NORTH CAROLINA
SOUTH CAROLINA • GEORGIA

REEF FISH WEBINAR SERIES

Tune-in to this **three-part webinar series** to learn about how **shark depredation** and **climate vulnerability** affect reef fish in the **South Atlantic** and hear from one of the researchers leading **The Greater Amberjack Research Program**. Each webinar will feature a guest presentation and will include time for audience questions. Scan the QR code below to register.



An Overview of Shark Depredation in the South Atlantic

Dr. Marcus Drymon
March 30th, 6:00pm EST

Understanding the Climate Vulnerability of Our Reef Fishery

Dr. Kevin Craig
April 6th, 6:00pm EST



The Greater Amberjack Research Program: Movement and Population Connectivity

Creed Branham
April 13th, 6:00pm EST



Register here:



For questions, please contact Ryan McMullen at ryan.mcmullen@safmc.net

Hundreds of Tackle Shop Visits

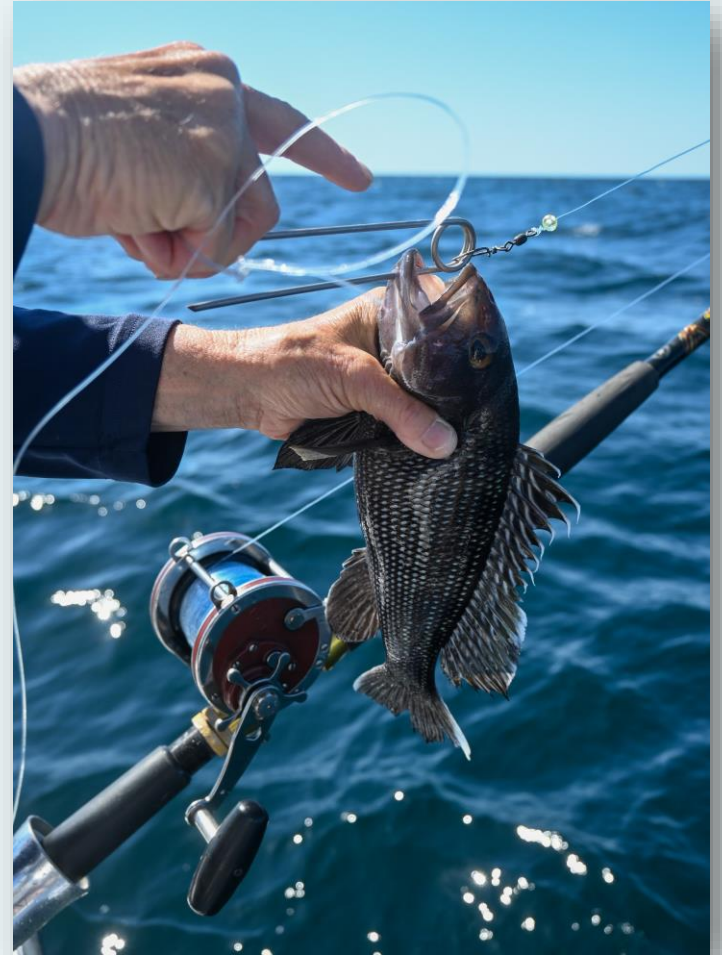


Successful Citizen Science Partnerships



Overall Benefits to Council and Sea Grant

- **Fellowship significantly expanded the Sea Grant and Council's ability to engage with fishing communities in the region.**
 - Expanded the reach of the Council's Best Fishing Practices and Citizen Science Programs, especially SAFMC Release.
 - Allowed for more flexibility in outreach mechanisms and an increase of in-person outreach activities.
 - Addressed how multiple entities were working on BFP outreach and created consistency in messaging and leadership.
- **Fellowship was an entry level position, working with early career individuals.**
 - Fellows left the position with a strong network and understanding of their desired career trajectory.
- **Created leadership development opportunities for Council staff.**
- **Facilitated mutual learning between all Sea Grant and Council staff.**



Lessons Learned from the Fellowship



- There was significant interest in the Fellowship position, but relocation requirements to Charleston, South Carolina created concerns.
- Reimbursement structure was challenging for Fellow to navigate given all four Sea Grants and the Council have different requirements.
 - Structural differences were especially challenging when paying partners such as charter captains.
- As with many projects, funding is needed, and travel funds are especially important for this type of position.



The Future of the Partnership

- There is a strong desire to continue the partnership between Sea Grant and the Council.
- There could be opportunities beyond best fishing practices, any focus that would match Council and Sea Grant goals is an opportunity.
- Exact future is somewhat undetermined as it would be dependent on available funding sources.



Questions?

Any recommendations for funding sources?

Topics that would benefit from this style of partnership?