



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Increasing Public Comment Attendance, Engagement, and Accessibility





Challenges

- Attendance varies widely by issue.
- Repeat commenters provide valuable input, but broader representation is needed.
- Barriers
 - Awareness: Notice of public comment opportunities
 - Ability: Time, location, digital literacy
 - Motivation: Trust, perceived impact of comments, complex management system

What Success Might Look Like

Expanded Participation

- Increased attendance from both existing participants and new commentators
- Participation sustained across multiple meetings and meeting types

Broader Representation

- Broader geographic participation
- Representation from previously absent groups
- Participation across a wider range of age groups and sectors

More Effective Public Input

- Comments referencing specific agenda items
- Earlier engagement during scoping and development stages rather than final actions



Current Opportunities

- In person at all Advisory Panel and Council meetings
- Via webinar at all Advisory Panel and Council meetings
- During scoping and public hearings (in person or webinar, depending on meeting type)
- Through a Google Form on the SAFMC website
- Mail
- Email



How Public Comment Opportunities are Promoted

- Federal Register Notice
- SAFMC website and meeting agendas
- South Atlantic Bite
- Social media - Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X
- In person – seminars, events, tackle shops
- Emailed to tackle shops listed on tackle shop database



Ideas To Improve Engagement, Attendance, and Accessibility



“How to comment” handouts and visuals



Short walk-through videos for website, YouTube, and social media



More frequent social media posts



Comment summaries in Council newsletters



Discussion

- 1 Where are we losing potential participants: awareness, ability, or motivation?
- 2 How can previously engaged participants be reengaged?
- 3 What channels are we underutilizing for reaching new audiences?
- 4 How can the Council better demonstrate how public comments influence discussion and decision-making?
- 5 How can we better equip participants with the tools to make an effective comment?
- 6 How should the Council evaluate whether new outreach efforts improve attendance, accessibility, and effectiveness of public comment?