

Summary Update on Port Meetings

As part of the Council’s Visioning Project, a total of 26 port meetings have been scheduled in South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida, and Georgia. The schedule is listed below and the full meeting information can be found at: <http://www.safmc.net/resource-library/2014-port-meetings>.

South Carolina:	North Carolina:	Florida:	Georgia:
Feb 11 – Murrells Inlet (2 meetings)	March 17 – Southport	March 25 – St. Augustine (2 meetings)	April 14 – Savannah
Feb 12 – Charleston	March 17 – Shallotte	March 26 – Titusville (2 meetings)	April 15 – St. Simons Island
Feb 17 – Charleston	March 18 – Sneads Ferry	March 27 – Port Salerno	April 15 – Brunswick
Feb 18 – Bluffton	March 19 – Morehead City	March 27 – Lake Park	April 16 – Shellman Bluff
Feb 20 – Columbia	March 19 – Raleigh	March 31 – Key West	
	March 20 – Wanchese	April 1 – Marathon	
	March 20 - Hatteras	April 2 – Key Largo	

Port Meetings Conducted To Date

To date, **five port meetings** have been conducted in South Carolina with a **total of 53 participants** representing the commercial, recreational, for-hire, and snapper-grouper federal dealer sectors. The February 12th meeting to be held in Charleston, SC with local chefs and restaurant owners had to be rescheduled due to the ice storm that hit the region that week. The meeting will be rescheduled before May 2014.

Summary of Issues/Solutions in South Carolina

The issues that fishermen discussed at the port meetings had similarities across the state. However, there were some regionally specific and sector specific issues that were brought up at each of the meetings. Below is a preliminary snapshot of some of the key management issues fishermen felt could be improved and some of the solutions offered to improve these issues.

- 1. Reporting:** *This issue came up at every port meeting and fishermen expressed their frustration with the duplicity of state and federal reporting (commercial sector); the lack of reporting required for the recreational sector; and the need for more streamlined reporting using new technology.*

Solutions –

- Implement voluntary or mandatory electronic reporting for all sectors.
- Test and utilize new technologies for electronic reporting (web-based, mobile apps, etc.).
- Streamline reporting required for state and federal agencies to reduce redundancy; information should feed into one centralized database.
- Develop incentives for accurate self-reporting of catch by the recreational sector.

- 2. Data Collection & Research:** *This issue was discussed at each port meeting in the context of the accuracy of data, timeliness of data collection and analysis, and the need to collect geographically specific data on certain species. Groups also discussed the need to involve more fishermen in cooperative data collection programs and research projects in order to foster “buy-in” by fishermen.*

Solutions –

- Develop methods to collect anecdotal information from fishermen that is then incorporated into analyses outside of traditional data collection programs (commercial logbook, MRIP, etc.) and in stock assessments; Self-reported data using web-based/mobile technology, video, etc. was suggested.
- Develop a training program to teach fishermen how to voluntarily collect data using standardized methods that could be used in analyses and stock assessments.
- Create more opportunities for cooperative research for fishermen.
- Develop joint agreements with the states for data improvements (similar to the Joint Enforcement Agreements currently in place for law enforcement).
- Implement a recreational tag harvest program for tracking harvest of certain species (recreational and for-hire sectors).
- Require a separate federal snapper grouper permit/license for recreational fishermen.
- Create a recreational snapper grouper (reef fish) stamp.
- Add a check box to the current state saltwater fishing license to indicate if the license holder participates in offshore fishing; this would help target MRIP surveys and other recreational data collection programs.

3. Flexibility in Management – Annual Catch Limits (ACLs), Seasons and Allocations: *The need for more flexibility in management was discussed at all port meetings and ranged in topic from seasonal closures, in-season allocation modifications and managing fishing seasons to allow better stability for fishing businesses (commercial and for-hire sectors).*

Solutions:

- Develop staggered fishing seasons for recreational sector to allow longer fishing seasons; example of two weeks on and two weeks off for fishing was given.
- Allow for in-season bag limit adjustments for the recreational sector; utilize “step-down” approach currently used in the commercial sector for a reduction in bag limits once 75% of the ACL has been met; also allow for an increase in bag limits when it is evident that the recreational ACL for some species will not be met for the year to allow full access to the recreational ACL.
- Allow underages in one sector to roll over to other sectors within a season; this would allow the total ACL to be utilized.
- Consider more recent catch history instead of historical catch history when addressing sector allocations; this concern arose from the decline in commercial fishing activities in recent years.
- Address methods for allowing new entrants into the fishery and specifically the endorsement programs for black sea bass and golden tilefish (commercial sector).

4. Reducing Discards: *Fishermen expressed concern over the timing of fishing seasons for certain species and frustration about having to discard fish for regulatory reasons knowing that fish caught in deep water were likely going to die.*

Solutions:

- Implement a poundage limit on catch of snapper grouper species with no size limit (zero discards) for the recreational sector; an aggregate per person or trip poundage limit.

- Consider implementing a bycatch allowance for undersized species at the trip level (commercial sector).
- Consider new techniques and methods for decreasing barotrauma; fish descending tools, etc.

5. Regional/Sub-regional Management: *The topic of “one-size-fits-all” management was discussed at all port meetings and fishermen expressed concerns about the broad geographic range of the Council’s jurisdiction and the need for more regionally specific management for certain species and certain management issues.*

Solutions:

- Develop a joint agreement with states to conduct state-by-state- management of federal species possibly for just the recreational sector (similar to the Joint Enforcement Agreements currently in place for law enforcement).
- Allow the state to manage certain species (black sea bass and red snapper) for the recreational sector.
 - Develop a method for calculating the health of the recreational red snapper fishery in SC; fishermen felt it was important to analyze state specific recreational data in order to get state specific quota for red snapper and other species.
- Use research to clearly define zone management for some species in the recreational sector; fishermen mentioned the use of genetics research to better delineate zones.
- Place South Florida (South of Ft. Pierce) into the jurisdiction of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council.

6. Time/Area Management: *The topics of seasonal closures and management of areas to protect habitat and spawning fish was discussed at the port meetings. Fishermen expressed the need to consider the timing of seasonal closures and the use of area management for specific management objectives.*

Solutions:

- Coordinate the fishing seasons to align the seasons to maximize fishing opportunity.
- Consider a rolling spawning season closure (for shallow-water groupers) that accounts for when the fish are actually spawning in different areas of the region; fishermen felt that fish are spawning earlier further south in the region and then spawn later in the northern part of the region.
- Shorten the spawning season closure for shallow-water grouper to a 2-month closure that aligns with when the fish are spawning in different regions.
- Implement sunset laws on the current system of Marine Protected Areas in the region.
- Identify and protect known spawning areas.
- Reconfigure existing Marine Protected Areas to encompass known spawning areas.
- Place more artificial reef materials in federal waters where fish could spawn.

Outreach Efforts – Promotion of Port Meetings

- The port meeting flyer reviewed by Council at the December 2013 meeting was distributed in hard copy to over 1,900 federal commercial snapper grouper permit holders (225-lb limited and unlimited), for-hire snapper grouper permit holders, and federal snapper grouper dealers.

- Port meeting information has been posted to the Council’s website:
 - <http://www.safmc.net/resource-library/2014-port-meetings>
 - <http://www.safmc.net/resource-library/council-visioning-project>
- A web-based port meeting discussion comment form was developed by staff and posted on the Council’s website to collect additional comments and ideas from fishery stakeholders. The web comment form lists the same discussion items that will be discussed at the in-person port meetings and also asks for additional ideas. All results collected from the web comment form will be incorporated into the results of the port meetings. See: <http://www.safmc.net/resource-library/port-meeting-discussion>.
- An announcement about the kick off of the port meetings was sent out to over 1500 constituents via the Council’s Constant Contact e-mail distribution list.
- Information on the port meetings and visioning project was featured as the cover story in the Council’s Winter 2014 issue of the *South Atlantic Update* and in the Chairman’s Corner article written by Chairman Hartig. (Circulation is 4500+.)
- Several news articles, fishing forum posts and e-news blasts from partner agencies and organizations have featured information about the port meetings. These are being compiled by staff.
- Staff is compiling a list of all port meeting outreach efforts and strategies to assess the success of these strategies for use in future outreach programs.