

## **Joint Meeting of the Law Enforcement and Information & Education Advisory Panels**

# **Summary Report**

February 6, 2013

The Law Enforcement Advisory Panel and the Information & Education Advisory Panel met jointly on the afternoon of February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2013, in Charleston, SC. The intent of the joint meeting was not only to obtain recommendations from the APs, but also to inform them of upcoming improvements to outreach and information resources, particularly as they pertain to enforcement. Below is a summary of comments and recommendations under each agenda item.

### **Vessel Monitoring System (VMS) Outreach**

Council staff presented an overview of Snapper Grouper Amendment 30. The amendment includes a single action to consider a VMS requirement for the commercial snapper grouper fleet. The APs were also informed of the proposed timing of the amendment. The APs offered the following comments:

- Training (mandatory?) on VMS units should be part of the process.
- NOAA OLE is already developing VMS outreach materials that would be available online as well as on hard copy format. The materials will include an expanded FAQ publication that would provide step-by-step instructions and screen shots of the different VMS systems and how to perform various functions on the systems. For example how to make a declaration on specific VMS units.
- Fishermen with dually permitted vessels have concerns and would want the agency to explain how the VMS requirement would be addressed when they are operating under the for-hire permit.
- Simplify language in the FAQ to address concerns fishermen that may have (i.e., is the VMS going to reveal where their fishing spots are?)
- There was a question regarding the use of VMS versus having onboard observers. Address this issue in the FAQ. Note that CE-BA3 still has options for observers on 2-3% of commercial snapper grouper vessels.
- For the FAQ, expand on why this is being considered.

- Would it be advantageous to point out additional capabilities of a VMS system besides law enforcement?
  - Safety benefit is important to highlight. Note that VMS should only be considered as a secondary tool for safety. The required EPIRB is the first source of information, but VMS can provide an accurate report as well.
  - Enhance potential benefits not from a viewpoint of what this does “to” you, but what can it do “for” you.
  - Explain how VMS might “level the playing field” for fishermen that comply vs. fishermen that do not comply to management measure allowing for violations to be issued to those fishermen that do not comply using VMS location data.
  - Explain how funding for law enforcement activities is limited and having VMS in place could provide law enforcement the capability to efficiently and quickly enforce management measures.
  - Focus on success stories and highlight how the system has been used in the past and/or in other areas
  - Present facts in a way that explains how a VMS would benefit the fishermen directly
  - Expand “Benefits” section on fact sheet or include the benefits of VMS in the question asking why VMS is being considered for this fishery.
  - An added benefit to VMS would be to “protect” the interests of commercial fishermen. For instance, the Council has opted to move boundaries of closed areas based on VMS information from the rock shrimp fishery. Those adjustments to closed areas were only possible by the availability of VMS information. This could serve as a potential “success story.”
  - Fishermen have concerns about batteries and use of VMS on smaller vessels. Perhaps add these issues under the “Challenges” section, and include information about recent changes to resolve some of these problems.

### **SAFMC Mobile App and Website Upgrade**

Council staff briefed the APs on the development of a mobile regulations app. The program is being finalized and will be available for download soon for both Android and Apple platform users. The app includes tabs for fish i.d. and regulations applying to commercial and recreational fisheries, managed areas (i.e., MPAs), National Marine Sanctuaries, important state and federal numbers, and a section about the SAFMC.

The initial release of the app, called SA Fish Regs, will include species managed by the Council and some commonly encountered state managed species. There will be an update to the app in late March that will include Highly Migratory Species, sharks, and tunas. Council staff will accept additional comments/edits for the update through mid-March. The APs

supported development of the app and agreed it will be a helpful outreach tool for the general public as well as law enforcement personnel.

### **Review of the Law Enforcement Section of the SAFMC website**

The advisory panels were provided an update on the progress of the Council website redesign and they were asked to provide input on improvements to the Law Enforcement section of the website. The advisory panels recommended:

- Adding links to reports from recent fishery cases from the NOAA Office of General Counsel.
- Add a link to each state's contact information for that state's weekly LE reports if available.
- Add link and information about the USCG Fisheries Training Center.
- Highlight success stories of successfully prosecuted law enforcement cases that demonstrate fishery conservation.
- The LEAP cautioned against having an online forum for answering law enforcement questions but didn't oppose having an FAQ.

### **Other Business**

Council staff requested input from the APs on how to improve dissemination of regulatory changes to field officers. The APs offered the following:

- NMFS notifications usually are issued late in the week, not allowing enough time for LE officers to be notified of changes.
- Maintaining updated information online is important.
- Sometimes Fishery Bulletins contain too much information that may not be relevant to LE and "gets lost."
- "One-stop-shop" for regulation changes would be ideal.
- Consider using cross links to websites for current fishing regulations – similar to a web portal that may include links to:
  - NMFS SERO website for ACL/Quota Monitoring (Commercial and Recreational)
  - Council webpage showing fish i.d. and regulations
  - Link to download for SA Fish Regs mobile app
  - Webpages on state fishing regulations for each state fishery management agency
  - Fishery Bulletin links
- Both APs supported having a "calendar" or summary of fisheries openings and closings available from the SAFMC website that includes annual closures as well as updated closures and openings.

- Consider announcing changes on VHF, especially for events that are taking place within a few days. Some regulatory changes are already being announced on VHF.
- VMS would allow the capability for instant messages to be broadcast to fishermen. However, because every character sent in a message over satellite has a cost, funding issues may not allow this to be done on a large-scale basis or over the long term.
- Individual state agencies can serve as a resource to disseminate information.
- One challenge is that some agencies do not allow their officers access to latest technology such as tablets and smart phones, or their use is limited (e.g., ability to download apps, etc.).
- FWC issues a “Hot Sheet” to disseminate information to fishermen. Something similar could be developed to keep law enforcement field officers informed of federal regulatory changes.
- Consider evaluating existing resources used to disseminate information to determine which are being more effective.
  - Job Aid – US Coast Guard
  - Fishing Forums on-line
  - Twitter/Other Social Media can be an effective tool to communicate information quickly but may be time-consuming to keep up with.