

SAFMC Staff Report

June 2025

Council Member Ongoing Development (CMOD)

The second Council Member Ongoing Development (CMOD) workshop was held April 30-May 1, 2025, in Vancouver, Washington. Hosted by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, the workshop focused on understanding vulnerabilities, risks, and uncertainties associated with climate-related variability and change. The workshop also included a skills focus on effectively communicating complex fishery management topics. Dr. Chip Collier, Council staff, and Council members Tom Roller, Kerry Marhefka, and Jimmy Hull attended the workshop.

Best Fishing Practices

Outreach Events

- BFP, Citizen Science, and Sea Grant staff were invited by a 2024 BFP MVP to have a booth in the ‘Next Generation Anglers’ zone at the Florida Saltwater Expo in Daytona. Staff focused education on proper fish handling and measuring while sharing Citizen Science and SAFMC involvement opportunities with fishermen.
- In April, Citizen Science and BFP staff collaborated with local captains on a seminar at Haddrell’s Tackle in Mt. Pleasant, SC focused on bottom fishing, BFP, and SAFMC Release. Approximately 40 fishermen attended.
- Staff continue to plan for ICAST, with a booth focusing on best fishing practices and SAFMC Release. Staff will be participating in FWC’s Donuts and Descending Devices event for the fourth year and leading an interactive trivia component to engage attendees further.

Best Fishing Practices Master Volunteer Program (BFP MVP)

- BFP MVP empowers key members of the fishing community to educate others on best fishing practices, management, and involvement opportunities. 2025 workshops began in April, with a focus on port samplers and agency personnel. The program warmly welcomes 148 new BFP MVPs from Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina! Attendees were excited to learn more about SAFMC outreach efforts, and each had the opportunity to take informational materials to share with fishermen in their communities. Additionally, a BFP MVP workshop is being planned with the U.S. Coast Guard at the Southeast Regional Fisheries Training Center in Charleston, SC for July.

Sea Grant Reef Fish Fellowship

- The Sea Grant fellow completed two articles on best fishing practices and SAFMC Release for Florida’s *Coastal Angler Magazine (St. Augustine Edition)*, featured in the May and June issues, with 10,000 copies of each monthly edition distributed to 200+ locations throughout St. John’s, Flagler, and Putnam counties.
- The fellow also helped launch and promote the [South Atlantic Release Rodeo](#), a Sea Grant-led challenge running from May 1 to July 31, encouraging fishermen to submit

photo-verified releases to SAFMC Release. Participating fishermen have the opportunity to earn Sea Grant giveaways each month.

- Additionally, the fellow has organized a partnered media trip with Z-Man set for June 9 to produce high-impact educational content on best fishing practices—namely barotrauma identification and treatment—and citizen science projects. Content will be filmed, edited and produced by a professional videography crew and promoted by Sea Grant, Z-Man, Z-Man Pro Brian Latimer, SAFMC, and Keen Eye Marketing to a combined audience across all channels of over 1 million followers.
- The fellow presented to the Environmental Conservation Corps in Charleston, SC on April 24th. The presentation was given to 15 people and went over the basics of federal fishery management, introduced the fellowship and its activities, and explored the BFP campaign and SAFMC Release. Corps members and leadership were extremely interested in barotrauma, descending devices, and the Council’s Citizen Science Program. All outreach materials brought by the fellow was taken with many Corps members asking for extra copies to give to friends and family members who fish.

WOULD THE COUNCIL LIKE TO SEND A LETTER TO THE NATIONAL SEA GRANT OFFICE AND SOUTH ATLANTIC STATE SEA GRANT DIRECTORS EXPRESSING HOW VALUABLE THE REEF FISH FELLOWSHIP COLLABORATION HAS BEEN FOR THE COUNCIL?

BFP Evaluation Workshop

- The BFP Evaluation Workshop was held February 20th-21st in Charleston, SC. SAFMC staff invited researchers conducting work on BFP perceptions, outreach, and usage to present their work and discuss how it may benefit the SAFMC BFP program. A summary report is being drafted, and workshop outcomes are currently planned to be presented at the September 2025 Council meeting.

“What It Means to Me”

The BFP OS and Digital Media and Communications Specialist released a fourth video for the ‘[What It Means to Me](#)’ project, featuring Council member Tim Griner. Staff are now working on the next video release featuring Council member Robert Spottswood, Jr.

Website and Digital Communications Updates

- Completed SAFMC [Infographic for May CCC meeting](#).
- Working on a multi-organizational team to coordinate outreach for ongoing SSMZ research.
- Website development:
 - Updated “[Resilient Fisheries](#)” page, published “[Lines of Communication](#)” webpage, and continued work “Regulations FAQ” page.
 - Continued general website maintenance, posting meetings, pages, and news.

- Continued public comment upkeep.
- Continued social media management.
- Continued FishRules updates and management including regulations review and overhaul.

Lines of Communication: Conversations with the Council

Stakeholder input has always been a fundamental component of the Magnuson Act and council system. Council staff has begun work to develop a plan for holding stakeholder engagement meetings along the South Atlantic coast, meeting fishermen in their communities. These meetings, now called *Lines of Communication: Conversations with the Council*, will provide an opportunity for Council members to have productive dialogues with fisheries participants. Practice runs of the Lines meetings were held this spring with the Mackerel Cobia, Snapper Grouper, and Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panels. Staff are currently working on incorporating their feedback into the overall process design. Additionally, draft materials, meeting locations, and a communication plan are all being developed to guide outreach efforts for *Lines*. Large scale outreach will begin the next few months with the first official round of Lines meetings occurring the week of November 3, 2025, in Georgia and the week of February 2, 2026, in North Carolina. Meetings in South Carolina and Florida will be planned for Fall 2026/Winter 2027.

Marine Resources Education Program (MREP) Southeast

Plans continue for the next MREP Workshop scheduled for November 17-21, 2025 in St. Petersburg, FL. Both the South Atlantic and Gulf Councils have distributed announcements from the Gulf of Maine Research Institute advertising the open application period to attend the workshop. Priority will be given to those who submit applications by June 15, 2025. We will continue to solicit applicants via the SA Bite newsletter. Staff remain involved in both the MREP Steering Committee and Plan Team.

Citizen Science Program

The Council's Citizen Science Program has had a busy spring. Program and project highlights are summarized below.

Citizen Science Program 2024 Annual Report

- The [Citizen Science Program's 2024 Annual Report](#) is now available, highlighting the standout moments and achievements that shaped the last year.

Citizen Science at the SEDAR 90 (South Atlantic Red Snapper) Data Workshop

- FISHstory ([SEDAR90-DW16](#)) and SAFMC Release ([SEDAR90-DW17](#)) data were presented for consideration at the SEDAR 90 (South Atlantic Red Snapper) Data Workshop (April 2025).
- **Length composition data from FISHstory and SAFMC Release were recommended for use in the assessment by the SEDAR 90 Data Workshop Panel and SAFMC Release data are being considered in the development of release mortality estimates.**
- Additionally, SEDAR 90 Data Workshop research recommendations include developing more opportunities (e.g., citizen science, catch cards) to collect release lengths from the

recreational fleet; expanding the spatial and temporal range of historic records (e.g., FISHstory); and gathering more information on barotrauma mitigation technique usage rates. These recommendations support the continuation and expansion of the FISHstory and SAFMC Release projects.

- NOTE: It is early in the SEDAR 90 assessment. The data stage will be wrapping up in the upcoming weeks and the final assessment report is not scheduled to be completed until late 2026.

SAFMC Release

- [SAFMC Release 2024 Data Summary](#) was shared with project participants in February 2025 and posted to the project webpage in March 2025.
- Data collection, recruitment, and retention efforts continue for the SAFMC Release project. SAFMC Release focused outreach activities included monthly newsletters and social media. In April, staff shared information on SAFMC Release at SCDNR's Charter Summit in Murrell's Inlet, SC and collaborated with Snapper Grouper AP member, Cameron Sebastian, on a virtual seminar focused on SAFMC Release and Best Fishing Practices for the SC Coastal Scuba / Hurricane Fleet.
- Additional outreach collaborations with the BFP team are highlighted below and in the BFP Update section of this report.
 - The Citizen Science and BFP teams were invited to have a booth in the 'Next Generation Anglers' zone at the Florida Saltwater Fishing Expo in Daytona Beach, FL in March 2025. The booth focused on proper fish handling and measuring techniques while also sharing information on Citizen Science and SAFMC involvement opportunities with attendees.
 - In April the Citizen Science and BFP teams, collaborated with local captains on a seminar at Haddrell's Tackle in Mt. Pleasant, SC focused on bottom fishing, BFP, and SAFMC Release.
 - SAFMC Release was excited to collaborate with Sea Grant on a new initiative – the [Sea Grant South Atlantic Release Rodeo](#). Through this challenge, on May 1 – July 31, anglers are able to earn a chance to win Sea Grant giveaways by submitting information on their released shallow water grouper and Red Snapper to SAFMC Release.
 - CitSci and BFP staff shared SAFMC Release, FISHstory, and BFP informational materials with SG AP members, Randy McKinley and Haley Stephens, who did fishery focused presentations at a NC school and FL fishing club, respectively.
- Planning continued with NOAA Fisheries and state partners for a SAFMC Release National Saltwater Angler Registry pilot recruitment mailing in GA and SC. Mailing logistics will be finalized in the upcoming weeks with a target timeline for the mailing to go out in June 2025.

- Citizen science staff, in collaboration with NOAA Fisheries and state partners developed and submitted a FY25 ACCSP grant proposal, ‘Enhancing Recruitment & Retention for the SAFMC Release Citizen Science Project’. The proposal was approved for funding by the ACCSP Coordinating Council at their October 2024 meeting.

FISHstory

- Staff collaborated with Jacque Forman at Down the Hatch restaurant in Ponce Inlet, FL to scan historic photos for the FISHstory project in March 2025. Over 40 photos were scanned and archived through these efforts. They are currently being catalogued and processed for classification in Zooniverse and length analysis.
- As of May 2025, all previously archived and processed FISHstory photos have been classified by Zooniverse volunteers. Since the project’s re-launch in July 2024, more than 2,400 volunteers have contributed over 75,000 classifications (individual identifications and counts). NC State University is leading analysis of the Zooniverse data. Newly scanned photos are being processed for addition to the Zooniverse project in the upcoming months.
- Red Snapper measurements have been completed in all photos currently archived and estimates of length compositions are complete. King Mackerel measurements from the current photo archive are almost complete and length composition estimates will be complete in the upcoming months.
- In April, staff presented on the FISHstory project as part of SC Wildlife Federations’ Wild Webinar Wednesdays seminar series, highlighting the project’s progress and public engagement.
- Staff in collaboration with NC State, Zooniverse/Adler Planetarium, Citsci.org, and SciStarter submitted a proposal ‘Expansion of the FISHstory Citizen Science Project’ to the NOAA Fisheries’ Citizen Science NOFO in November 2024. The review process for this funding opportunity is still underway.

SMILE

- Work on the SMILE project has continued. Recent efforts have focused on refining laser and camera technology; image processing and further development of the AI workflow; data analysis; and the data management and archiving process.
- The SMILE Core Team, led by REEF, developed a proposal for the FY26 Coral Reef Conservation Fund to continue and expand SMILE project activities. The proposal was recently recommended for funding.
- REEF staff presented on the SMILE pilot project at the April 2025 SSC meeting. SSC members were supportive of the project and provided valuable feedback on methodology and analysis approaches, aiding in the project’s refinement.

- Additionally, REEF staff are collaborating with social scientists at Colorado State University on a survey to better understand the motivations and barriers for recreational divers to participate in the SMILE project.

SciFish Core Team Recognized with ASMFC 2025 Award of Excellence

The following excerpt is from ASMFC:

SciFish Core Development Team members: Julia Byrd and Meg Withers, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council; Brandi Salmon and Ami Staples, North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries; Kathy Knowlton, Georgia Coastal Resources Division; Mike Bucko, Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management; Lauren Dolinger-Few and Dr. Andrew Cathey, NOAA Fisheries; and Julie DeFilippi Simpson, Atlantic Coastal Statistics Program

There are numerous citizen science projects along the Atlantic coast that contribute valuable data and knowledge to our stock assessments, but data standardization and access can be a challenge. The SciFish team developed an innovative app which standardizes the collection of citizen science data from Atlantic coast fisheries by providing a single platform for multiple data collection projects. They designed it so that researchers can create new data collection projects with no IT development and storage costs – allowing projects to focus on the project goals and participating anglers.

For more than three years, a series of surveys, workshops, and public meetings were conducted by the Team to determine which data fields are most important to end users, scientists, managers, and other stakeholders to ensure that the SciFish platform met everyone’s needs. In addition, the Team developed (1) the mobile SciFish application and project builder, (2) an application process consisting of pre- and full applications so only those projects that meet the project requirements and use sound citizen science practices are approved, and (3) an overall policy document approved by the ACCSP Coordinating Council.

The Team launched SciFish in 2024 and is already approving new projects and receiving national interest from additional partners at the state and federal level. The app is being considered by the Marine Recreational Information Program and received interest from the Pacific States Marine Fisheries