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Advancing Equity and Environmental Justice in Underserved Communities of the Southeast Region

March 2024 Meeting of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Jekyll Island, Georgia

Outline

Part 1

- Purpose, Goals
- Engagement strategy
- What we heard
- Q&A

Part 2

- Resulting action items
- Next steps
- Discussion

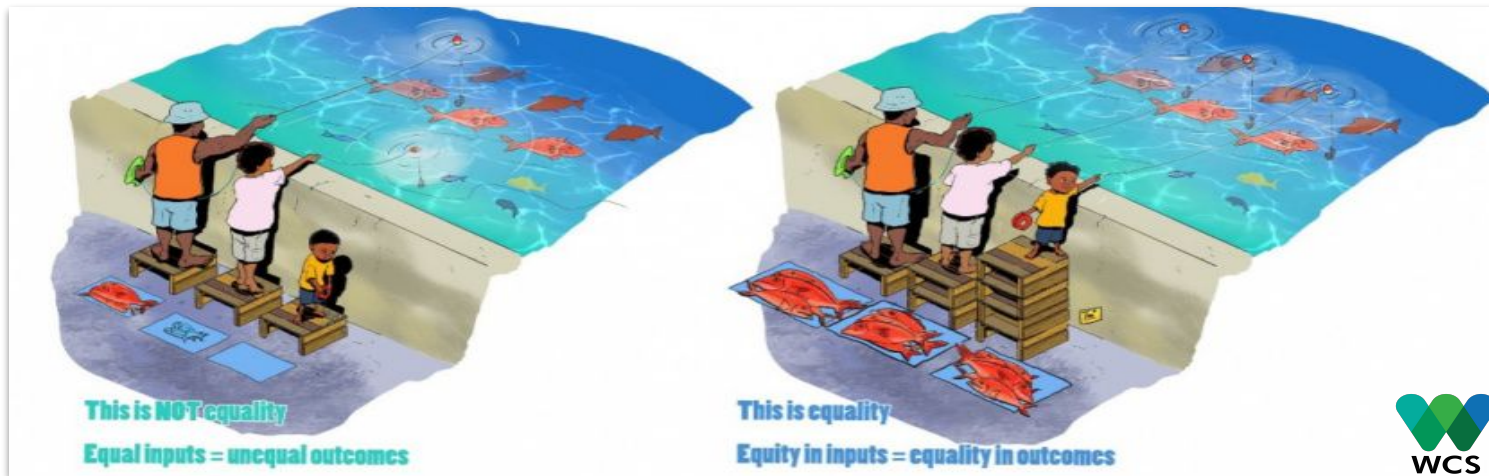
NOAA Fisheries' EEJ Strategy

- Establishes national framework for advancing EEJ through our mission-related work
- Requires regional implementation plans -- due April 5, 2024



Key Terms: Equity

Equity means the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment.



Definition from Executive Order 13985.



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Key Terms: Environmental Justice

Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of race, color, gender, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies including but not limited to:

- Equitable protection from environmental and health hazards
- Equitable access to decision-making processes
- Equitable opportunity for disadvantaged communities that have been historically marginalized



Definition from the Environmental Protection Agency.



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Key Terms: Underserved Communities

Underserved communities have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life.



These include **geographic communities** as well as **populations sharing a particular characteristic** such as: **women and girls; Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons*, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and other persons of color**; persons facing discrimination or barriers related to **gender identity**; members of **religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+)** persons; persons with **disabilities**; persons who live in **rural areas**; and **persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality**.

Definition based on Executive Order 13985



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Southeast Equity and Environmental Justice Implementation Plan: Engagement Strategies

- **Seven Focus Groups**

- Morehead City in central North Carolina
- Wanchese along the Outer Banks of NC
- Belhaven along the Pamlico Sound of NC
- Darien near Brunswick in southeast Georgia
- Jacksonville in northeast Florida
- Islamorada and Key West in the Florida Keys



- **Scoping** in & around Georgetown, Pawleys Island, Little River and Beaufort in South Carolina
- **Public Request for Information** (closed September 30, 2023)
- **Virtual multilingual listening session** (conducted September 28, 2023)



Who We've Engaged

- Ethnicities: Hispanic, Gullah-Geechee and African American, Native American, White
- Gender/Sexual Orientation: male and female
- Geography: rural-coastal & municipal-coastal
- Age: young adults to retirees
- Employment: NGOs, commercial fishers and vessel owners, charter captains and vessel owners, fishing crew members, seafood processing workers, community organizers

Key Takeaways

- Further diversify communications and outreach platforms to more effectively meet underserved communities where they reside and work (Dock)
 - Location
 - Timing
 - Education Level
 - Technological Capability
 - Language
- Increase presence in communities and leverage support of trusted and knowledgeable community liaisons (Sea Grant, port agents, community NGOs) where applicable
 - Recognize / acknowledge the value of community liaisons
 - Institutionalize communication mechanisms with community liaisons
- Understand cultural and historical context
- Regulatory Review: Snapper-Grouper Permits and HMS
- Disasters Mitigation and Infrastructure

Key Takeaways

- For many, the contemporary situation is truly challenging
 - Many commercial participants emphasize that if problems related to seafood importation are not addressed quickly, they may need to leave the industry
 - Diminishing dock space and fewer working waterfronts are also perceived as major constraints around the region
 - Cumulative difficulties related to permit costs, limited availability of crew members, and fuel expenses are commonly said to be diminishing intergenerational involvement in marine fisheries

Key Takeaways

- Underserved persons often do not feel decision-makers understand, consider, or represent their perspectives and viewpoints
- Members of underserved communities often feel exploited by coastal land developers and federal projects such as offshore wind and others
- People from underserved communities are depending on us to partner with each other and other state and federal agencies to find solutions



Request for Information

- 20 comments
 - 17 from individuals
 - 3 from organizations
- Feedback
 - 55% expressed opposition
 - 25% expressed support
 - 20% neither supported nor opposed; suggestions only
- Open and honest communication critical to address discomfort and fear about what this means and desired outcomes



Questions?

Action Items - Methodology and Types

- **Methodology**

- Formulated from responses to Request for Information, focus group meetings, scoping, other informal meetings/conversations
- Drafted potential performance metrics
- Organized by national objective
- Incorporated sorting/ranking criteria (short-term/long-term, funded/unfunded, +)

- **Types**

- Green -- seemingly straightforward, primarily related to accessibility
- Yellow -- may need to further consider roles, responsibilities, applicability
- Pink -- adopted from national EEJ strategy
- Blue -- other commonly heard/requested items acknowledged but not addressed in regional EEJ implementation plan (e.g., perceived sector inequities, enforcement)

Action Items

SECOND DRAFT Action Items and Perf Metrics for SE EEJ Implementation Plan

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	Barrier (from national strategy)	General, High Level Action (what we want to do)	Action Item (specific -- how we will do it)	Performance Metric	Implementation Timeframe (how soon the action could be implemented if funded)	Resources Needed	Resourced? (can be implemented with existing funds?)	Applicable Geographic Region	Underserved Community(s) Targeted / Affected by the Action	Requires partnership?	Other Partnership Opportunities	Notes
1	Policies and Plans: Ensure that our policies promote equal opportunities for all and do not create unintended inequities or unequal burdens for underserved communities.											
2												
3	Barrier #2 Structural / Aquaculture	Prioritize advancement of equity and environmental justice in ongoing and future activities, including in equitable climate mitigation, and conservation and management solutions (SE Geographic Strategic Plan, 2023-26)	Develop regional guidelines to enable fair and equitable provision of offshore aquaculture opportunities among underserved fishery participants who seek alternative forms of ocean employment	Relative percentage of underserved fishery participants receiving MREP-AQ training, aquaculture grants, or other aquaculture-related opportunities	Long-Term (3+ years)	Staff time	Uncertain	All	All	No		
4	Barrier #4 Complexity / Aquaculture	Streamline the permitting process for persons ready to pursue marine aquaculture	Collaborate with state and federal permitting agencies to develop permitting guides for aquaculture projects where applicable	Number of permitting guides developed	Short-Term (1-3 year)	Staff time; Funding; translation	Uncertain	All	All	Yes; states, territories, EPA, USACE		Where do we already have permitting guides in place?
5	Barrier #4 Complexity / Aquaculture	Streamline the permitting process for persons ready to pursue marine aquaculture	Prioritize and fund MREP-AQ to inform and assist prospective aquaculture lease operators, and recruit underserved community	MREP-AQ is funded and executed; percentage of underserved	Short-Term (1-3 year)	Staff time; Funding; translation	Uncertain	All?	All	Yes; GMRI		

Obj 1: Empowering Environment Obj 2: Policies and Plans Obj 3: Research and Monitoring Obj 4: Outreach and Engagement Obj 5: Benefits Ok

Action Item Types - Research & Monitoring

Identify underserved communities and their needs, conduct collaborative research, and assess impacts of management decisions

- **Community Focus**
 - Identify and assess needs of underserved communities
 - Gather data on barriers and challenges in fishing and aquaculture participation
- **Equity Assessment**
 - Conduct equity assessments across fisheries value chain
- **Impacts Analysis**
 - Evaluate impacts (services and management actions, climate change, offshore wind, and seafood imports)
 - Compare projected vs. actual outcomes, consider cumulative effects
- **Collaborative Research and Science**
 - Increase co-production and co-development of stock assessments
 - Integrate local and traditional ecological knowledge into decision making process
- **Additional Research Areas**
 - Explore significance of diversification, literacy issues, and addiction

Action Item Types - Outreach & Engagement

Build relationships with underserved communities to better understand engagement preferences and improve information sharing

- **Diverse Communication Channels** (social media, mail, text, phone, **community newspapers...**)
- **Inclusive Language Technology**
 - Simple plain language
 - Tech support for virtual meetings
- **Proactive and Tailored Outreach**
 - Use special strategies for rural areas
 - Target underserved populations (e.g., women)
 - Identify or establish community liaisons for direct interaction
 - Review and adapt to all education levels
 - Leverage local insights for effective outreach
- **Multilingual Stakeholder Support**
 - Translate products
 - In-house multilingual liaisons for seamless communication
- **Additional Strategic Initiatives**
 - Educational opportunities
 - Language that emphasizes care and consideration
 - Partnerships for addiction and mental health support

Action Item Types - Policies & Plans

Ensure that our policies promote equal opportunities for all and do not create unintended inequities or unequal burdens for underserved communities

- **Equitable Access**
 - Offshore aquaculture
 - Cooperative research
 - Fishery disaster assistance
 - Seafood and permit markets
 - Decision making processes
- **Cultural Awareness**
 - Observers
- **Two-Way Information Sharing**
 - Climate research and response
 - Local ecological knowledge
- **Streamlined and Transparent Information Collection**
 - Surveys
 - Fishing permits

Action Item Types - Benefits

Distribute benefits equitably by increasing access to opportunities

- **Technical Support**

- Grants
- Fishing permits
- Fishery disaster assistance

- **Educational Support**

- Vocational training
- Scholarships, internships and mentorship programs

- **Financial Support**

- Grants (outreach and education, capacity building)
- Strategies to increase access to capital

- **Other Supportive Measures**

- Collaborative projects to preserve working waterfronts, protect fishing communities impacted by wind energy and other federal initiatives
- Strategies to remedy identified access or allocation disparities

Action Item Types - Inclusive Governance

Enable the meaningful involvement of underserved communities in decision-making processes

- **Engagement Enhancement**
 - Public meetings and input processes; research, monitoring, and science
 - Logistics and scheduling
 - Communication strategies
 - Partnerships and financial assistance
- **Representation on Advisory and Decision bodies**
 - Fishery Management Councils
 - Take Reduction Teams
- **Educational Initiatives**
 - Informational materials
 - Marine Resources Education Program

Action Item Types - Empowering Environment

Provide institutional support to implement EEJ

- **Training**
 - Specialized -- observers, port agents, grant reviewers
 - Plain language -- All staff
 - EEJ -- All staff, Council members, APs, and Committee members
- **Interagency Workshops**
 - Resource and information sharing
 - Partnerships to address cross-jurisdictional challenges
- **Resources to Support this Work**
 - FTE anthropologists / non-economic social scientists at SERO and SEFSC
 - EEJ Coordinators at SERO and SEFSC
 - Funding to Councils for EEJ Coordinators
 - EEJ funding strategy

Next Steps



- Review draft action items
- Provide feedback by March 14, 2024
 - How does the Council already support EEJ efforts?
 - Are the additional actions identified realistic / achievable if adequately funded?
 - How would you prioritize them? (or what are your top 3 priorities)
 - What else could the Council do to support EEJ efforts?

THANKS & DISCUSSION

