

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
BEST FISHING PRACTICES WORKSHOP
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
Ponte Vedra, FL
June 12, 2017

The Best Fishing Practices workshop was held June 12, 2017. The workshop started with a presentation on the number of fish discarded in recreational and commercial fisheries by Chip Collier, Council staff. The estimated number of fish discarded dead exceeded the number of fish kept for several species in the recreational fishery. The number of releases and dead discards reported through the Commercial Discard Logbook indicated the number of releases in the commercial fishery is low relative to kept fish for most species (except red snapper).

Andy Loftus presented information developed with Loftus Consulting, FishAmerica, and American Sportfishing Association. In a review of the literature and websites, there was conflicting information on best fishing practices. FishSmart (Fishsmart.org.) was started to develop guidelines to improve survivorship of released fish based on science. In recreational fishing, the number of released fish is the “culmination of millions of individual encounters” and the solution will need to focus on individuals. The FishSmart website includes information and videos on best practices and general guidelines. An important practice to improve survivorship of fish released from deepwater is to learn the signs of barotrauma. Sometimes descending fish is not needed. If the fish is showing signs of barotrauma, then descend the fish. Recently, this group has worked with the Harte Institute at Texas A&M to gauge effectiveness of descending devices and venting tools. Fishermen were provided descending devices and requested to participate in the survey. On average, the fishermen used device for 8 months, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the fishermen indicated they released more than 75 fish, and 76% indicated they would use a descending device when needed. Fishermen involved in the study preferred to descending devices over venting. The results had a direct benefit on red snapper and other species that were released using descending devices.

Steve Theberge brought several different descending devices. There were three different types of descending devices: lip grip and drop, hook and drop, and elevator. The devices ranged in cost from a few dollars to over \$70 and ranged in configuration from a hook with a weight to a large weighted hoop. Fishermen can select their preferred device depending cost and ease of use. It is not known which of the devices has the best survivorship and survivorship likely improves as fishermen become more familiar with the gear.

Dr. Chuck Adams presented on the results of a survey done by Florida SeaGrant and University of Florida in 2014. Agents went out and spent time with Florida anglers to see perception of release gear. The agents asked question on identifying signs of barotrauma, release tools, use of release tools to mitigate barotrauma, gaps in outreach. There 739 surveys that were completed. Results included: most fishermen had observed fish floating away, most were able to identify signs of barotrauma, many were able to identify swimbladder, 89% tried to get fish back down to depth, most used venting tool to get fish back to depth, most fishermen indicated they needed more education on using venting, and many were confident in using descending devices. The Florida SeaGrant Extension has developed a program to deal with barotrauma mitigation. The

full survey can be found at the Florida SeaGrant website (https://www.flseagrant.org/wp-content/uploads/TP_224_web.pdf).

Dr. Kai Lorenzen presented the results of a survey completed in late 2015 and early 2016 to understand perceptions of different barotrauma mitigation tools. The study surveyed Florida private recreational, for-hire, and commercial fishermen from South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico. About 1/2 of the private recreational and for-hire catches and 1/3 of the commercial catches were discarded. Fishermen reported barotrauma occurred for 25% of the released fish. It was estimated that only 10% of fish that should be treated for barotrauma were treated. Then the study looked factors on why fishermen used barotrauma mitigation methods and why they would change behavior. They used the Theory of Planned Behavior, which includes attitude, subjective norms, and perceived control, to develop the framework of the study. In the survey, the use of venting tools was more common than descending devices. Attitudes indicated that descending devices were more expensive and more difficult to use compared to venting tools. People felt confident in using both gears to mitigate barotrauma. Social norms were important factors for predicting a fisherman's intent to use a mitigation device. Regulations and peer pressure can help establish social norm.

Tom Twyford presented on actions taken by West Palm Beach Fishing Club through social pressure to change fishermen behavior and improve fish sustainability. The West Palm Beach Fishing Club is one of the oldest fishing clubs in the world. The West Palm Beach Fishing Club developed concept of red release pennant to help recover sailfish stocks. Prior to the program, sailfish were commonly displayed hanging on the dock after a fishing trip. Now, sailfish are rarely brought back to the dock. They also require circle hooks in their fishing tournament along with live releases. It took a long time to get anglers to buy-into the program. To help change the behavior, the change needs to be convenient and not too costly. Anglers also need to be invested in the resource so that they will be dedicated to the resource. The club has also changed from incentivizing bringing the largest fish back to the dock to encourage live releases. They closed shark and billfish records. Catch, weigh, and release are becoming more common. To assist with weighing of a live release, the West Palm Beach Fishing Club developed snook sling to help with better releases. It has been used in various fisheries and has been used for releases of other fish from piers. The West Palm Beach Fishing Club has also been educating the next generation of fishermen.

Cameron Rhodes, Council staff, gave a brief presentation on observations from the billfish fishery. As the South Carolina Governor's Cup Billfishing Series has become more active across social media platforms, its staff has become more aware of some of the fishing photography that stakeholders post on Facebook and Instagram. Many of these photographs showcase billfish out of the water. Removing a billfish from the water to photograph the trophy catch and then returning that fish to the water is actually in direct violation of federal law. Many resource users are either not aware of this or are directly ignoring the regulations associated with HMS permits. This is rather concerning from a number of different perspectives, particularly those of resource managers and law enforcement officers. These observations led to the development of an outreach campaign to highlight the gaps in fisher knowledge and to encourage people to utilize best practices when photographing fish. The presentation encouraged the Council to consider applying a similar outreach initiative to species managed by the SAFMC, specifically red snapper.

Bryan Huskey, the founder of Keepemwet, an organization which encourages responsible catch and release, gave a presentation on the importance of outreach campaigns and efforts through social media. Bryan is a photographer, videographer, and a freshwater fishing guide from Idaho. When he was confronted with a number of poor catch and release practices showcased in photographs across social media and magazines, Bryan created and started using the hashtag #keepemwet (which now has over 134,000 posts). The hashtag became the voice of a movement, encouraging fishermen to consider the wellbeing of fish while practicing catch and release. The grassroots momentum of the tag resulted in the founding of an organization dedicated to catch and release education and outreach. Bryan encouraged the Council to consider the value of social media in future outreach efforts, to work with partners in order to spread the word, and to engage stakeholders through innovative photography campaigns and competitions.