



# Reeling in insights & data: collaborating with fishermen through **SAFMC Release**

Julia Byrd & Meg Withers, SAFMC

Best Fishing Practices  
Outreach Evaluation Workshop  
February 2025



**Citizen  
Science**



**SAFMC Release wouldn't be possible without the valuable contributions of our amazing participants & partners!**

- Fishermen participants
- Project Design Team
- Outreach & data partners
- Project funders: ACCSP, SAFMC, Pew Charitable Trusts

# Citizen Science Program

## Why Citizen Science?

- Long standing data needs
- Fishermen want to help
- Citizen science provides the opportunity

## Program Approach

- Fill data gaps & address research needs
- Complement existing programs & partnerships
- Intentional project design with direct application to assessment & management
- Fishermen & scientist collaboration
- Umbrella to support internal & external projects



# Citizen Science



**Advancing science and  
increasing trust, one  
project at a time**

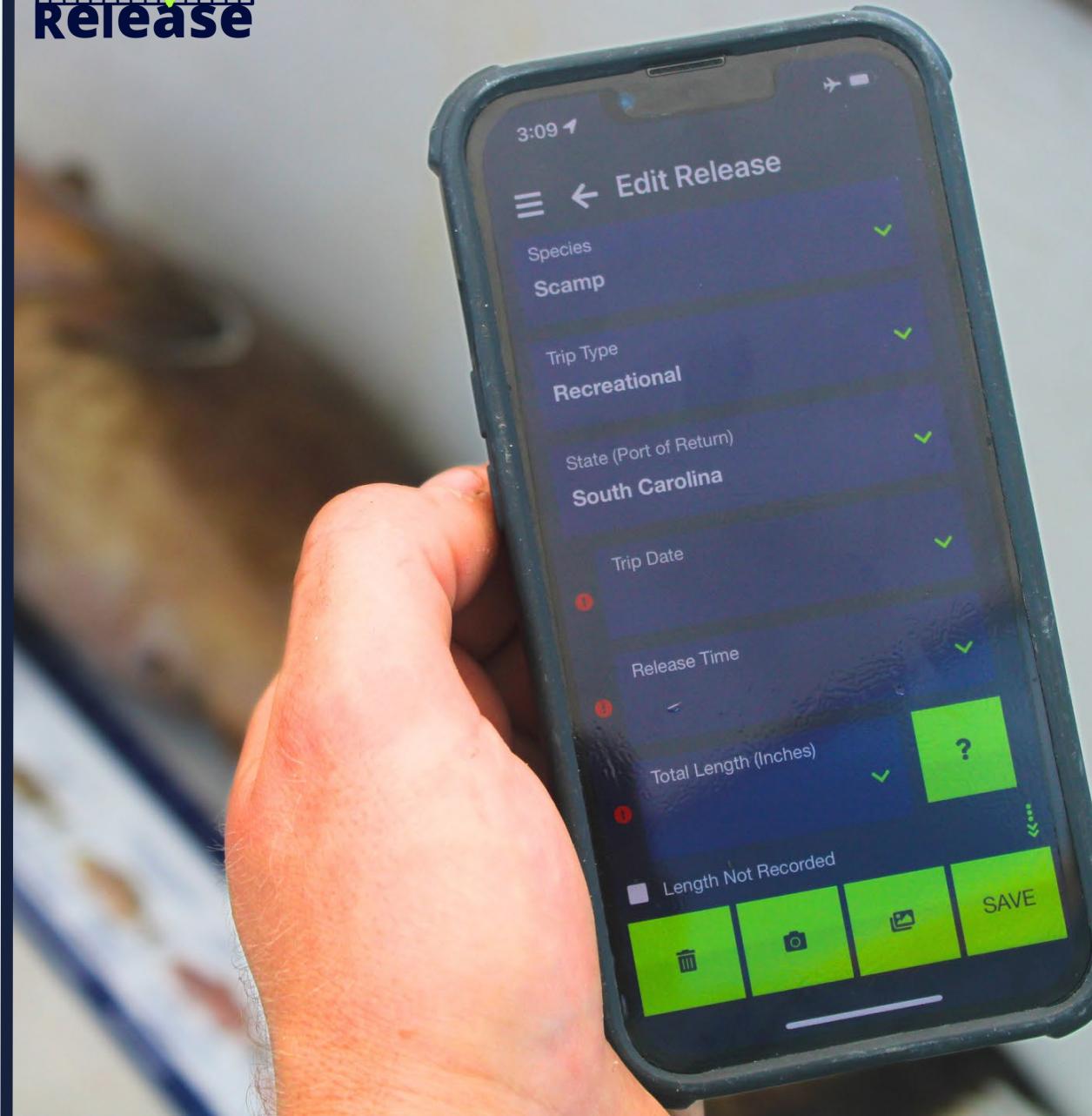


Number of released fish is increasing in the South Atlantic region

It's very important for us to learn more about these releases

Released fish can't be sampled back at the dock by traditional data collection programs

Fishermen hold the key to this crucial, on the water knowledge

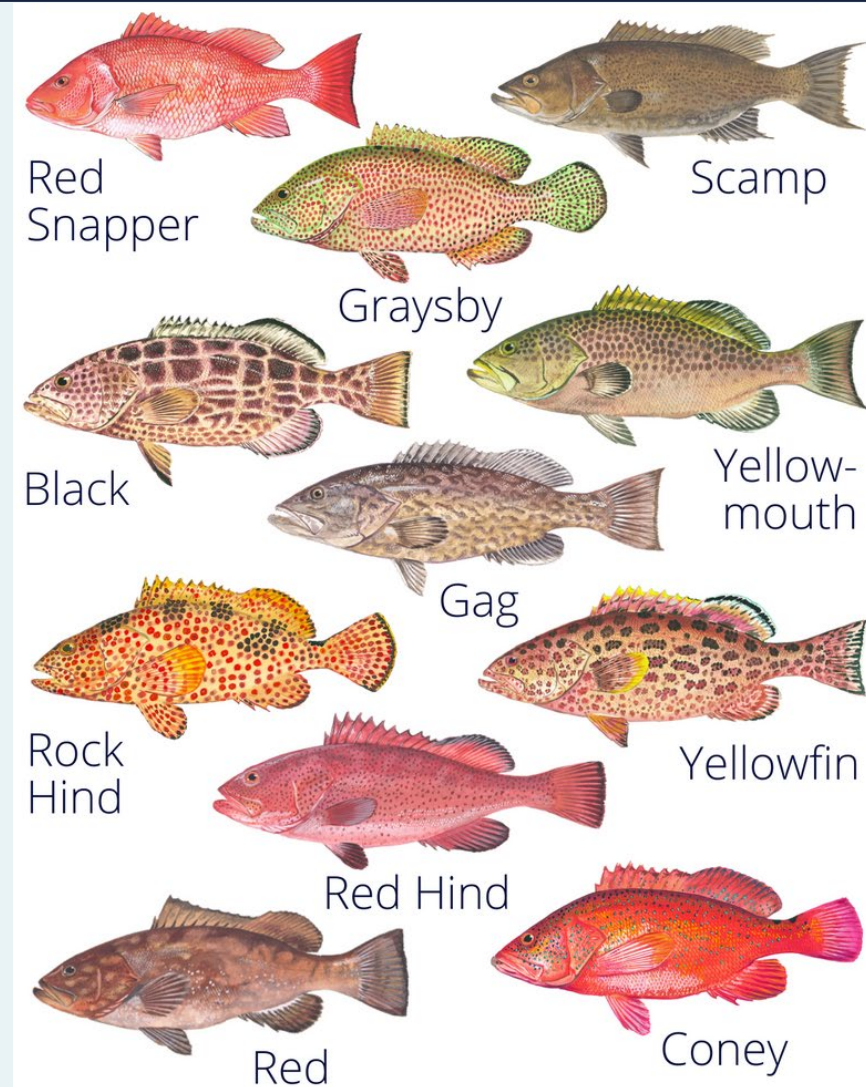


Working with commercial, for-hire,  
and recreational fishermen



© Mark McWaters

Collecting data on released shallow  
water grouper and Red Snapper using  
the SciFish mobile app







# Project Timeline



Scamp  
June  
2019



# Data Fields & Usage

Data collected include:

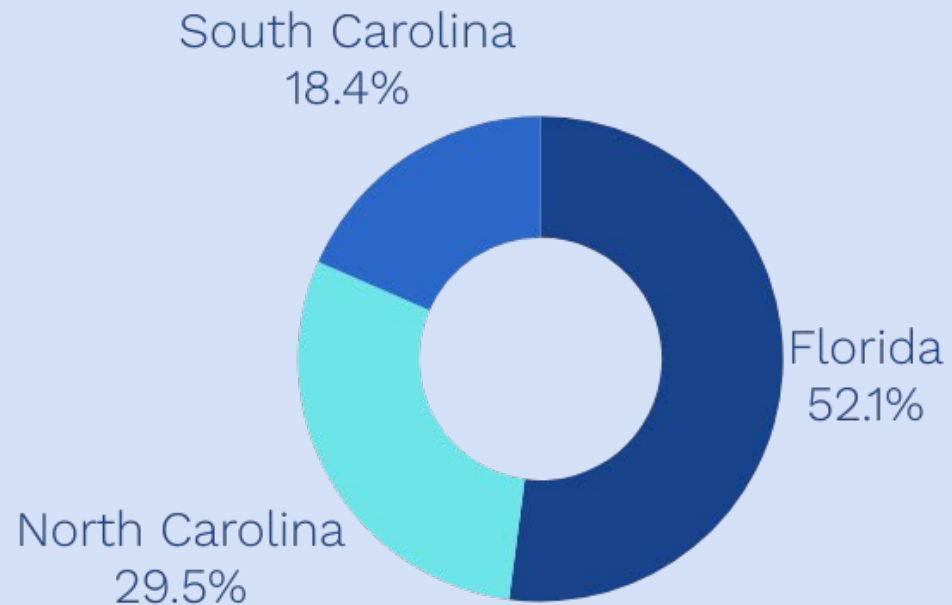
- Species
- Depth caught
- Fish length
- Optional location
- Hook type & location
- Shark depredation
- Venting & descending device use

Learn more about the size and survival rates of released fish.

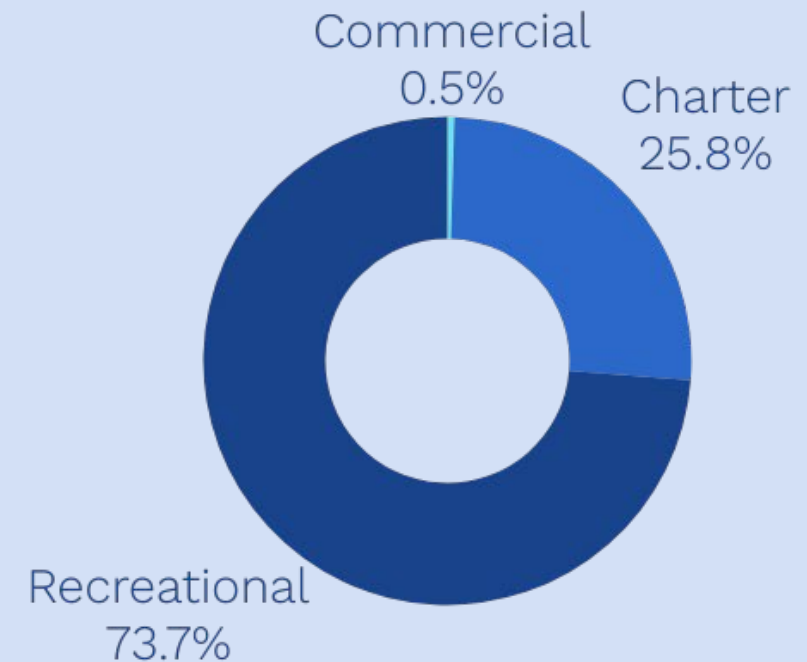


# 2023 Data Summary: Where Release Submissions Came From

By State



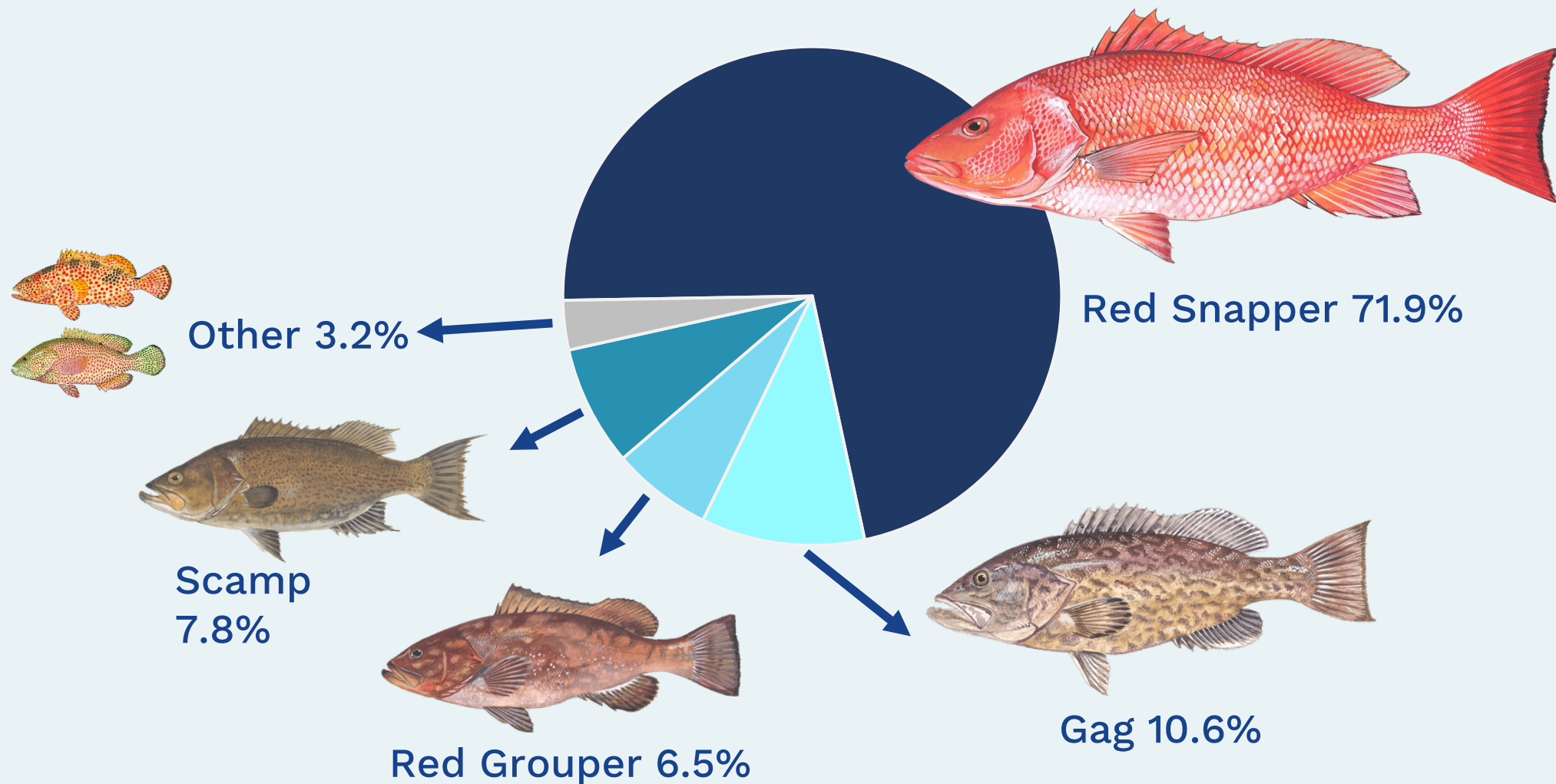
By Sector





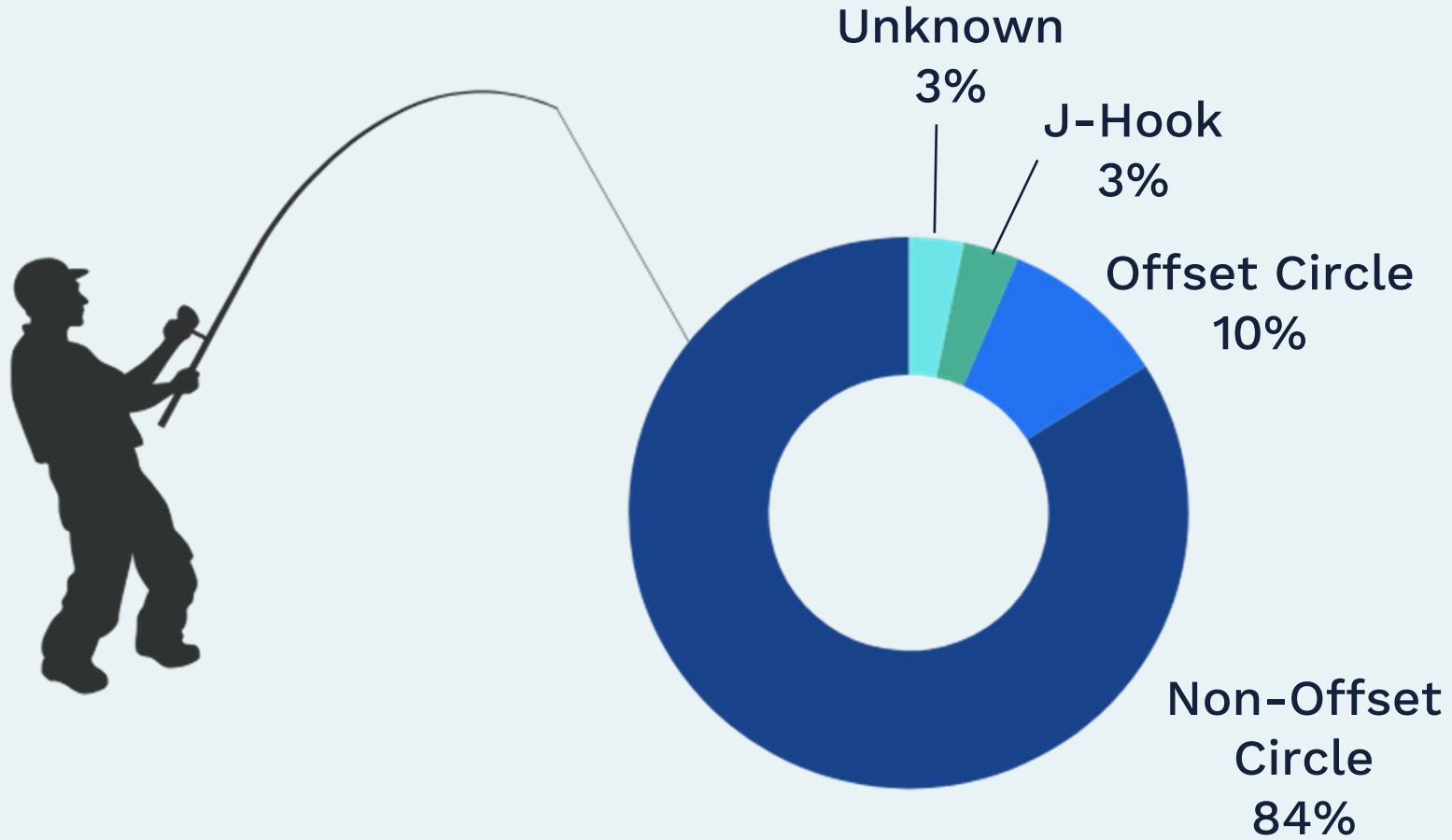


# 2023 Data Summary: Releases Logged by Species





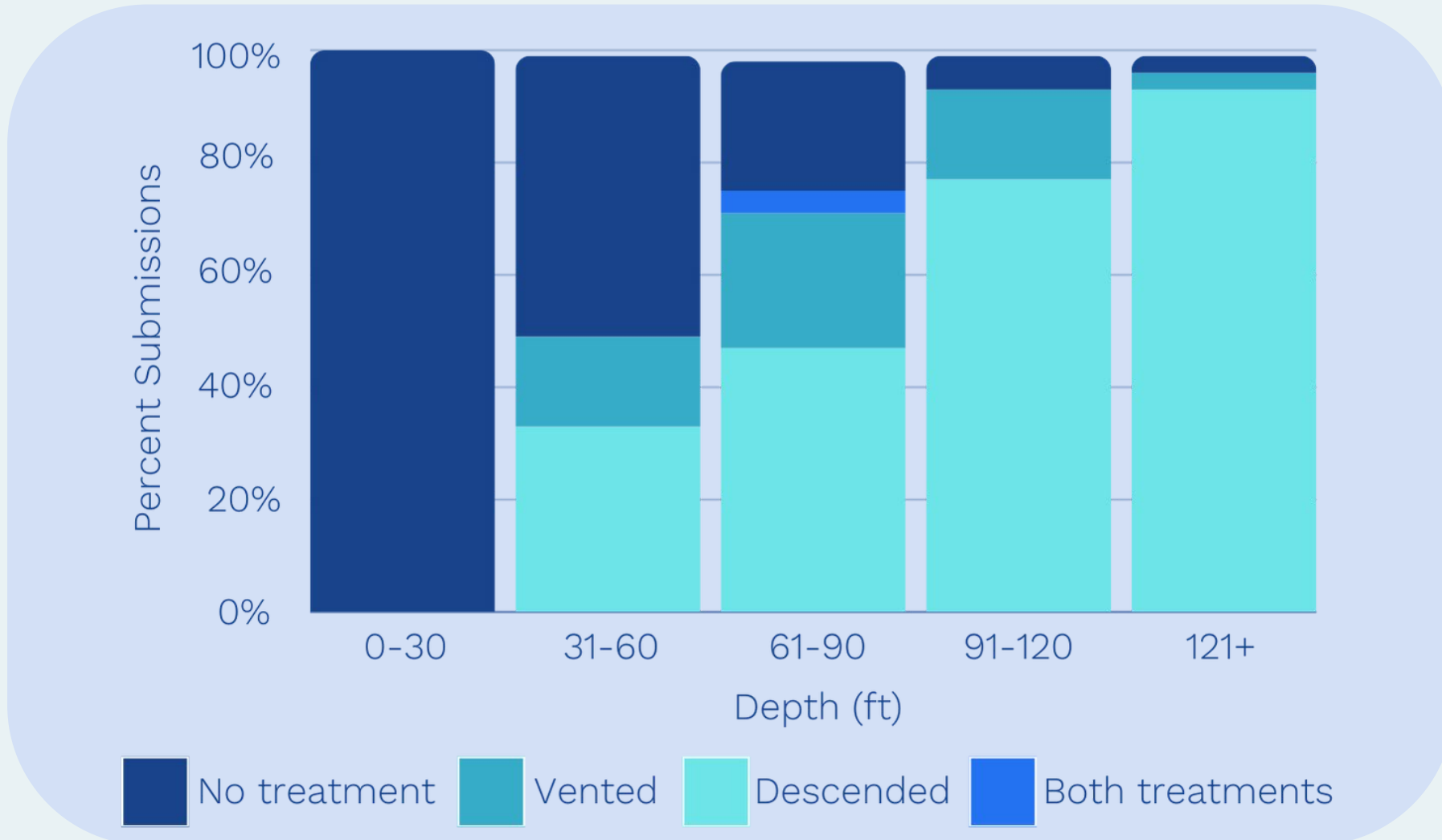
# 2023 Data Summary: Hook Type & Hook Location



91% of releases logged were hooked in the jaw



# 2023 Data Summary: Release Treatment by Depth







# **Building the SAFMC Release Community**

# Recruitment Strategies



Partnerships



Sea  
Grant

**FITMAN**  
CREEK  
WHOLESALE

# Recruitment Strategies



Partnerships



Tackle shop visits





# Recruitment Strategies



Partnerships



Tackle shop visits



Seminars &  
Conferences



# Recruitment Strategies



Partnerships



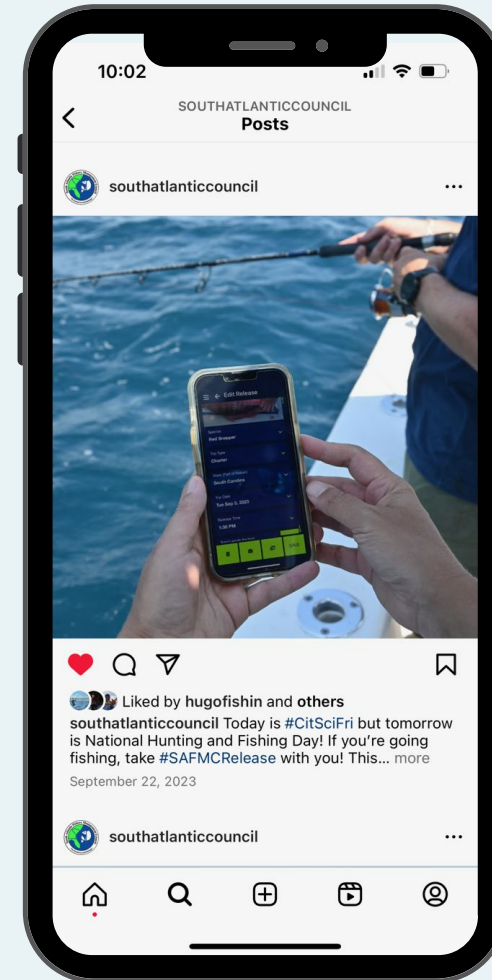
Tackle shop visits



Seminars &  
Conferences

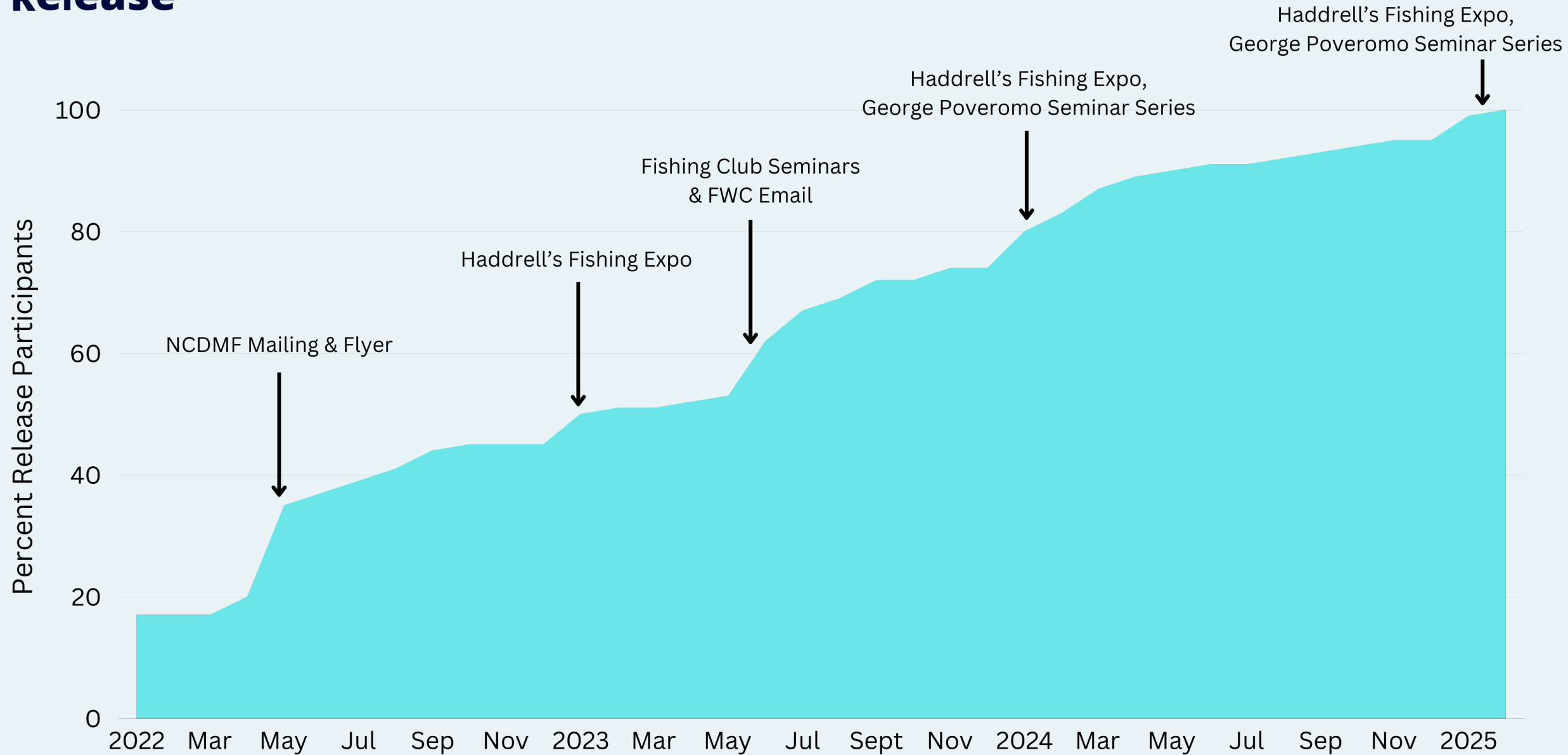


Social media



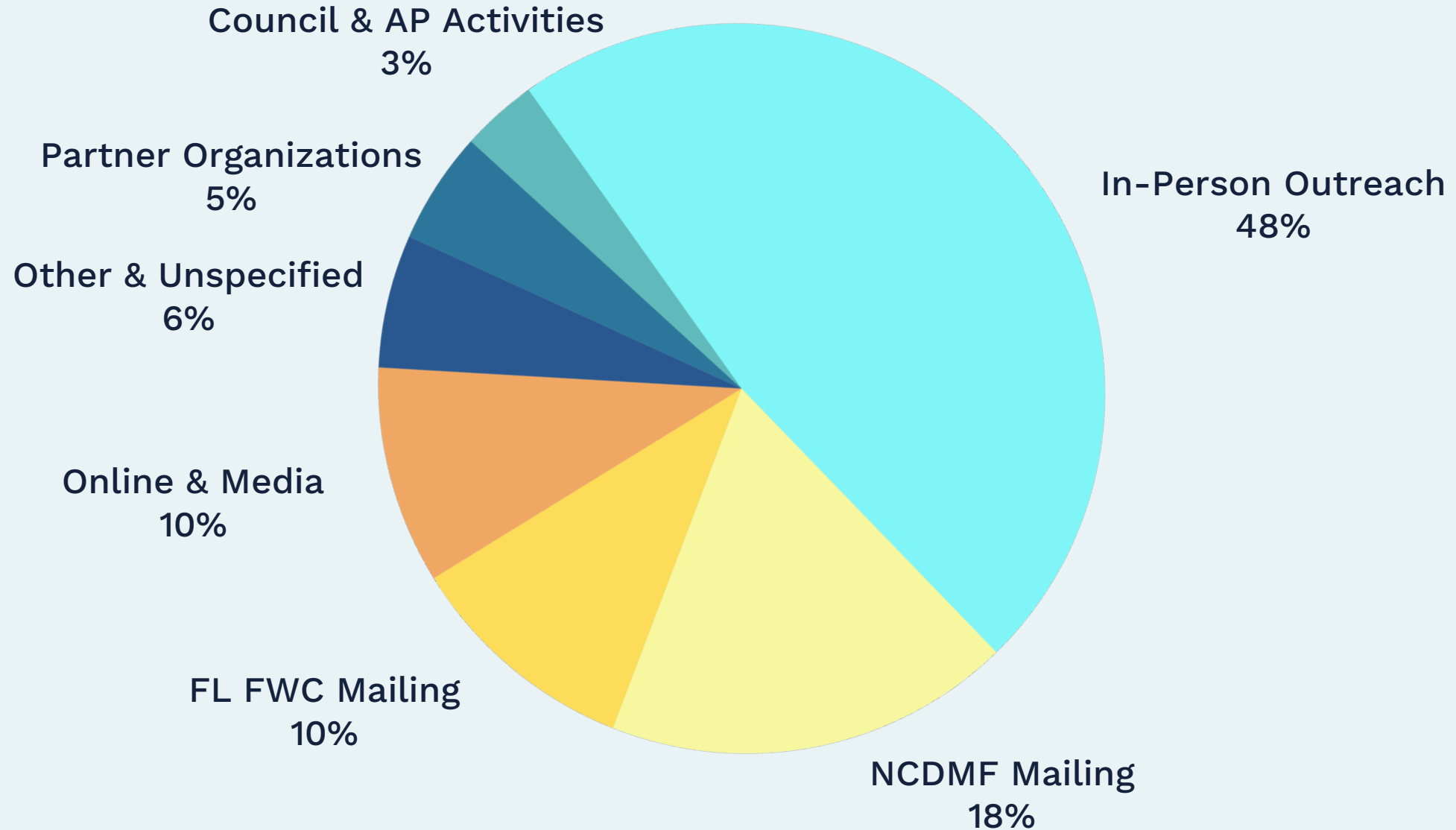


# Cumulative Participants Over Time





# Participants by Origin



# Retention Strategies



SAFMC Release  
newsletter



Recognition program



One-on-one emails



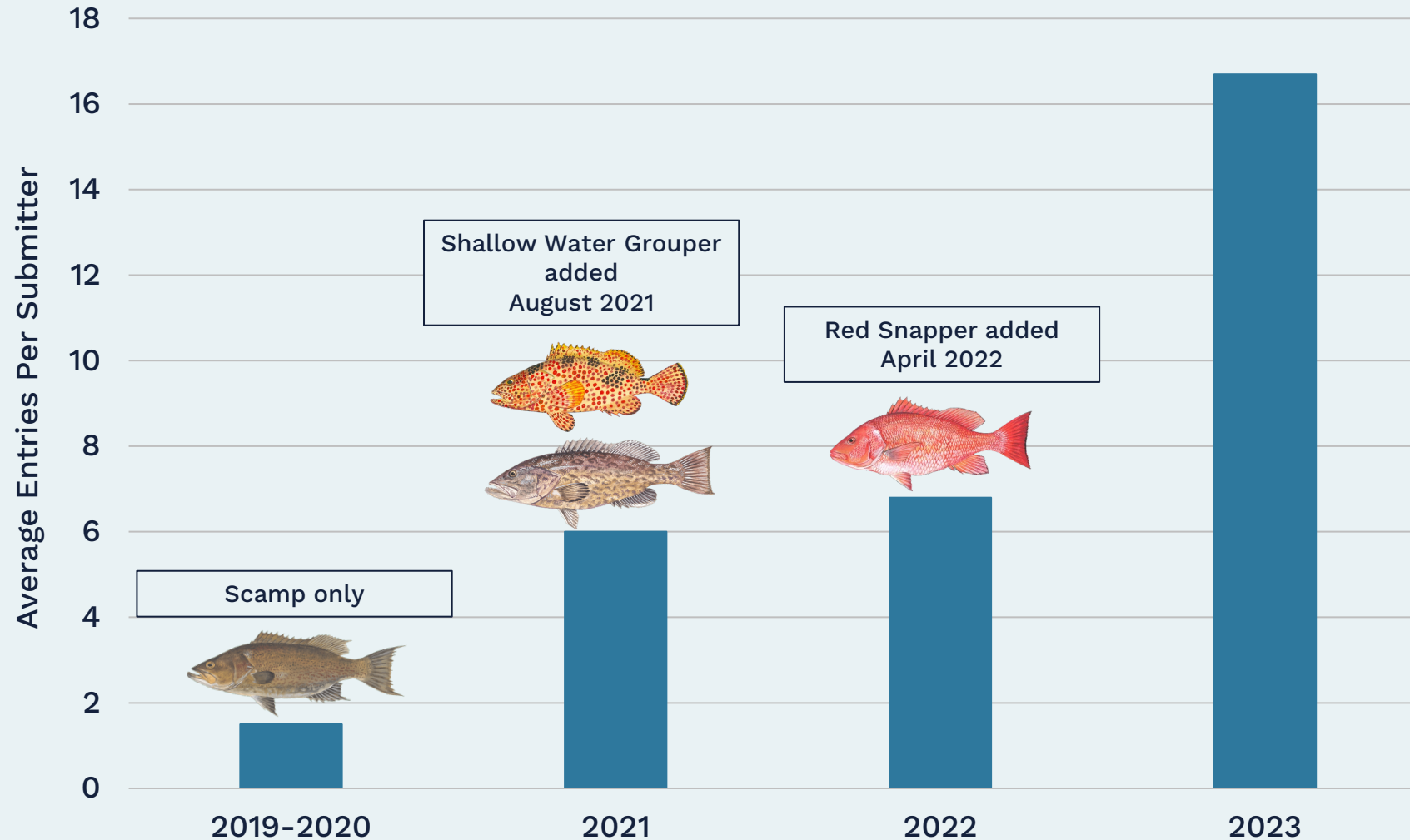
Exploring short-term  
tournaments



Annual data  
summaries



# Average Entries per Submitter







## **Key Takeaways to Date**

- Fisherman providing valuable insights on released fish
- Recruitment & retention is challenging
- Majority of time spent on outreach & volunteer engagement
- Relationship building is critical but takes time
- Fisherman participation in project can lead to broader engagement in management process



# Want to learn more?

Scan the QR code to check out our webpage!




Julia Byrd, [julia.byrd@safmc.net](mailto:julia.byrd@safmc.net)

Meg Withers, [meg.withers@safmc.net](mailto:meg.withers@safmc.net)

**BEST FISHING PRACTICES**

 **TARGET OPEN SPECIES**

 **MINIMIZE HANDLING**

