

## SAFMC Staff Report March 2025

### Best Fishing Practices

Best fishing practices (BFP) staff and citizen science staff attended two of Saltwater Sportsman's Seminar Series featuring George Poveromo. Staff interacted with over 300 fishermen in the Charleston, SC and St. Augustine, FL area. The Council also had a booth at the Haddrell's Tackle Fishing Expo in Charleston, SC, and gave two seminars with Captain Mark Phelps. Staff continue to plan for upcoming events including the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources Open House in Charleston, Georgia Department of Natural Resources Coast Fest in Brunswick, and Florida Saltwater Fishing Expo in Daytona. Staff have been collaborating with Sea Grant to plan several media focused charter trips in the coming months with key influencers in the south Atlantic fishing community.



*Staff spreading the word about best fishing practices, SAFMC Release, and the federal management process at the Haddrell's Fishing Expo in Charleston, SC in January 2025.*

Since welcoming 70 BFP MVPs in 2024, the BFP Outreach Specialist (OS) began planning for the 2025 Best Fishing Practices Master Volunteer Program. Workshops in 2025 will focus on port samplers and agency personnel. Staff are working with South Atlantic states to set workshop dates.

The Fishery Social Scientist, Quantitative Fishery Scientist, and the BFP OS are planning the Best Fishing Practices Evaluation Workshop slated for February 20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> in Charleston.

### “What It Means to Me”

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

## Website and Digital Communications Updates

- Commenced work as a project lead on the 50th Anniversary of MSA Documentary.
  - Reviewed over 60 proposals and nominated five finalists for Executive Director reviews.
- Created “Lines of Communication” logo and branding.
- Working on a multi-organizational team to coordinate outreach for ongoing SSMZ research.
- Website development:
  - New “[Science and SEDAR](#),” “[Climate Readiness](#),” and “[Seminar Series Archive](#)” pages.
  - 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. However, fisheries stakeholders increasingly express declining confidence in management institutions and often state that they feel their concerns are not heard or addressed. 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. By engaging stakeholders in this more informal setting, Council members will be able to build or improve relationships and increase engagement in the management process. Building and maintaining relationships and momentum for participation in the management. Practice runs of the Lines meetings are set to occur with the Mackerel Cobia and Snapper Grouper Advisory Panels this spring. The first official round of Lines meetings will occur 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

After being postponed in the fall of 2024 due to hurricane threats, the MREP Southeast Workshop was held February 10-14, 2025 in St. Petersburg, Florida. The first half of the week-long workshop focused on science and the second half on management. A total of 33 people participated in the weeklong workshop that included recreational, commercial, and for-hire fishermen from Texas to North Carolina. The workshop included tours to FWC’s Fish and Wildlife Research Institute and NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office. Participants also designed fishery sampling protocols for the Snaggletooth Snapper, participated in a “fishing” exercise, conducted a stock assessment based on data collected, and assumed the role of Council

members to make management decisions for the stock. In addition, many staff members from NOAA Fisheries, FWC, and the councils participated as presenters. Amy Dukes represented the SAFMC as a participant and Greyson Webb, Sea Grant Reef Fish Fellow, was selected to participate. SEDAR staff and Council staff also attended. The PIO continues to serve on the MREP Steering Committee and Plan Team.

An additional workshop will be held in the fall of 2025 with dates yet to be determined.

## **Citizen Science Program**

### *SAFMC Release*

- 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 recommended for funding at the fall 2024 ACCSP Coordinating Council meeting.
- Data collection, recruitment, and retention efforts continue for the SAFMC Release project. Staff are finalizing the SAFMC Release 2024 Data Summary and the 2024 Participant Recognition Program milestones. This information will be shared with project participants in February 2025 and will be available on the SAFMC Release webpage in March 2025. SAFMC Release focused outreach activities have included monthly newsletters and social media. Additional outreach collaborations with the BFP team are highlighted below.
- The Citizen Science and BFP teams led efforts to coordinate and participate in the Haddrell’s Fishing Expo in Charleston, SC, and the Saltwater Sportsman National Seminar Series featuring George Poveromo in Charleston, SC and St. Augustine, FL. At these events, Council staff manned a booth focused on BFP and SAFMC Release. At the Haddrell’s Expo, Citizen Science and BFP personnel collaborated with a local captain on seminars focused on bottom fishing, BFP, and SAFMC Release. Additionally, Citizen Science and BFP staff collaborated on a SAFMC Release / BFP focused seminar at the Piedmont Saltwater Fishing Club’s February 2025 meeting in Greensboro, NC.
- Planning is underway with NOAA Fisheries and state partners for a SAFMC Release pilot National Saltwater Angler Registry recruitment mailing in GA and SC.

### *FISHstory*

- 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.
- Staff held a scanning event in collaboration with the West Palm Beach Fishing Club in November 2024. Club members shared their photo archive, and thanks to this collaboration over 130 photos were scanned and archived for FISHstory. Photos are being catalogued and processed for classification in Zooniverse.

- Since FISHstory re-launched in Zooniverse in July 2024, over 2,400 volunteers have made ~61,615 classifications (individual identifications and counts). Analysis for the Zooniverse component of the project is getting started.
- Thanks to the FISHstory length analysts, Red Snapper measurements have been completed in all photos currently archived and analysis is underway to estimate length compositions.
- FISHstory has been featured on the front page of the [Moultrie News](#) (newspaper in Charleston, SC) and in the NOAA Teacher At Sea February newsletter.

### *SMILE*

- Staff have continued meeting monthly with the SMILE core project team. REEF staff are leading efforts to continue data analysis and the artificial intelligence data processing workflow, as well as the data management and archiving process. Opportunistic field work has continued with other REEF sampling programs.
- REEF and Council staff were invited to present on the SMILE pilot project as part of NOAA's Coral Collaboration Seminar Series in January 2025.
- The SMILE Core Team, led by REEF staff, is developing a proposal for the FY26 Coral Reef Conservation Fund to continue and expand SMILE project activities.
- REEF staff will be presenting SMILE to the SSC at their April 2025 meeting to get feedback on pilot project efforts.

Additionally, staff gave a guest lecture on the Council's Citizen Science Program for College of Charleston Marine Policy & Fisheries Science classes in January 2025 and have been invited to present on the Program as part of the Fort Johnson Marine Science Seminar Series on March 24, 2025.

### **ACCSP Bycatch Prioritization Committee and Biological Review Panel**

Staff attended the meeting, which was held in Charleston, SC, in February 2025 to update the bycatch and biological priority sampling matrix for FY2026 and conduct other business as needed.