

DISPATCHES FROM THE WATER

A Public Input Gathering Tool

South Atlantic Fishery Management Council – June 2022

At the March 2022 meeting, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) requested staff develop an online form to gather input from the public, similar to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council’s (Gulf Council) Fishermen Feedback (formerly ‘Something’s Fishy’) tool. The purpose of this new public input tool would be to gather information from Council stakeholders’ experiences and observations on the water and in the marketplace. The information gathered would be and used in conjunction with Fishery Performance Reports to complement scientific and landings data and to aid in management decisions, specifically sector allocations.

THE TOOL

In response to the Council’s request, staff has developed a public input gathering tool named Dispatches from the Water (Dispatches).

Members of the public will have the opportunity to provide their input on the topics such as:

- Have there been substantial changes in fishing behavior and catch levels for shadow shark over the last five years? How important is catch and release for shadow shark?
- How have social and economic influences (ex. price and demand, infrastructure, community dependance) affected the shadow shark fishery? Is shadow shark a driver of tourism?
- What environmental conditions influence the shadow shark fishery? Over the last five years have you seen changes in the distribution and size of fish, spawning months etc.
- Are there new management measures that the Council should consider or are there existing management measures (such as size limit, trip limit, bag limit, season, etc.) that should be changed?
- What else is important for the Council to know about shadow shark?

Those providing input using Dispatches will also be asked to provide their name, email, home port, state, and stakeholder affiliation (private recreational, commercial, for-hire, wholesale, non-governmental organization, or other). This information is consistent with what is provided during general Council public comment opportunities.

THE PROCESS

Dispatches from the Water will be made available through the Council’s website.


Similar to Fishery Performance Reports, Dispatches would gather information on a fishery species in advance of a scheduled stock assessment or to establish a baseline for an unassessed fishery. The intent is to collect information from stakeholders during the same quarter a Fishery Performance Report is being conducted by an advisory panel.

- Availability of the tool would be advertised through various Council outreach tools, including the website, social media, and the South Atlantic Bite e-newsletter.
- The tool would remain open for the public to provide their input for approximately two months (see **Figure 1** for full timeline).
- While name and sector affiliation will be collected, individual information (e.g., email address) will be kept confidential. Only aggregate information will be presented.



Figure 1: Sample timeline for development and use of Dispatches from the Water for Shadow Shark.

THE ANALYSIS

 A variety of qualitative analysis can be conducted using information collected through Dispatches from the Water as well as from the Fishery Performance Reports.

Simplified Thematic Analysis

- Information submitted via Dispatches from the Water and minutes from Fishery Performance Reports would be examined to identify topics, concepts, and patterns that come up repeatedly.

Example from the Gulf Council’s Fisherman Feedback Tool for Gulf Cobia:¹

- Many comments indicated that the average size of fish encountered is smaller than it has been historically.
- Comments indicating a negative trend in abundance noted that the spring migration had either diminished or moved farther offshore. This was attributed to red tide, influx of fresh water, or removal of structure.
- Comments indicated that the population decline has been occurring since about 2010.

Sentiment Analysis

- Submissions to Dispatches from the Water would be read by staff and classified as positive, negative, or neutral and/or an automated software would conduct the analysis.

Example from the Gulf Council’s Fisherman Feedback Tool for Gulf Cobia:

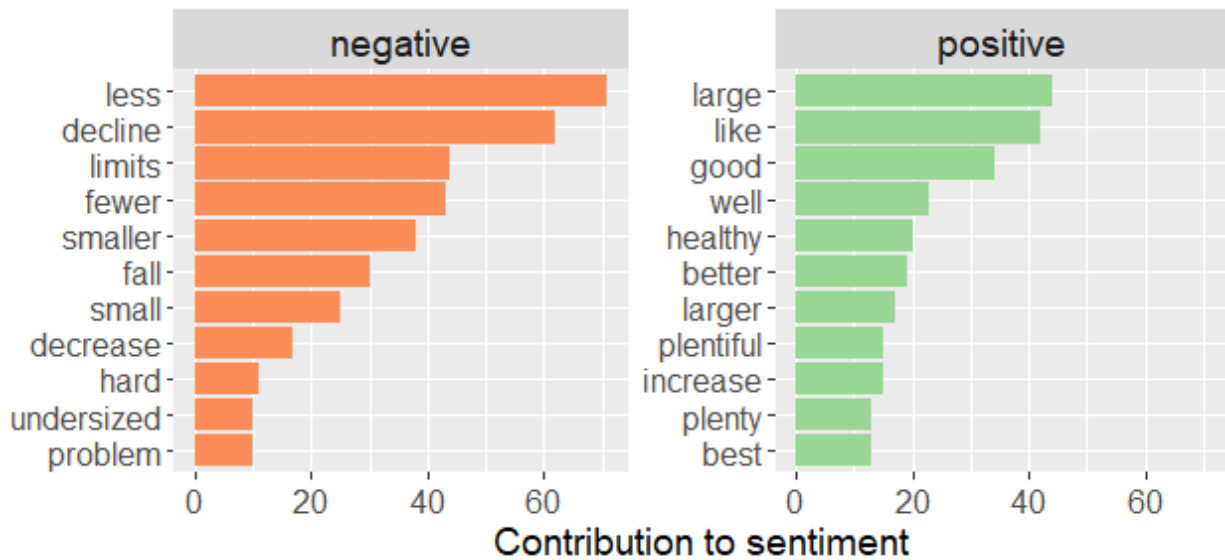


Figure 2: Most frequent words contributing to comment sentiment identified by automated sentiment analysis.

Word Clouds

- Submissions from Dispatches and minutes from Fishery Performance Reports could be used to generate a word cloud, which identifies which words and phrases are most common.

¹ <https://gulfcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/Somethings-Fishy-Cobia-Summary.pdf>

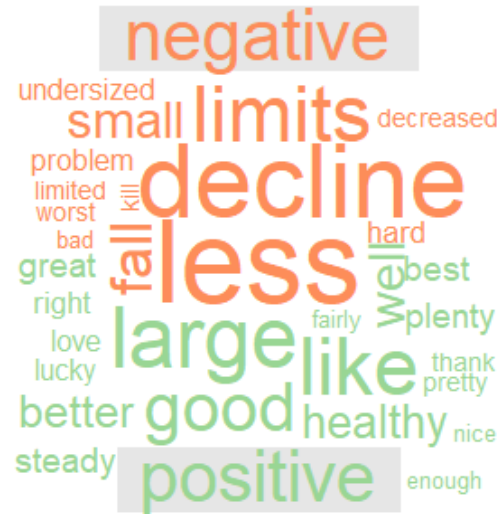


Figure 3: Most frequent words contributing to comment sentiment identified by automated sentiment analysis.

SOCIOECONOMIC PANEL FEEDBACK

↔ At their April 2022 meeting, the Socioeconomic Panel was asked to provide feedback and recommendations on Fishery Performance Reports and the public input tool.

The public is asked to provide input to the Council often (public hearings, meeting public comment etc.) How can staff ensure that the new public input tool stands out and isn't overly burdensome on stakeholders?

- The SEP did not indicate concerns about the tool being burdensome to stakeholders and did not put forth any recommendations on how to limit the burden on stakeholders.

Given constraints associated with the PRA, how can staff structure the tool to elicit information that is important for the Council's allocation discussions?

- Members of the SEP brought up concerns about employing a public input tool into the allocation decision tree process, specifically that the tool could be manipulated by different stakeholder groups in an effort to maximize their allocation share. However, the SEP generally felt the tool would be beneficial to the process.

Given time constraints, other than the analyses listed, are there other ways to present the data gathered through the new public input tool.

- None noted.

Any ideas for a catchy name for the new public input tool?

- The SEP suggested the name 'Fair Catch'.

COUNCIL ACTION

- ➡ Provide input to staff on the public information tool design and information gathering process and consider approving the tool for use, beginning with gray triggerfish and red grouper.

DRAFT MOTION: APPROVE DISPATCHES FROM THE WATER (PUBLIC INPUT GATHERING TOOL), AS MODIFIED.