

## **SAFMC Staff Report March 2024**

### **IRA Funding Update**

Initial project proposals for IRA funding were submitted on December 31, 2023. The initial allocation of \$375,000 will be used to support a projects coordinator and address several Scenario Planning action items. Final details for four IRA projects totaling \$2.125 million were submitted on January 30. These projects included:

1. Program Review: review of the Councils regulatory development program, with emphasis on increasing
2. Data limited stocks evaluation: applying an MSE style, stakeholder driven tool to either wreckfish or golden crab.
3. Stock boundaries and EFH update: evaluating stock ranges, with a potential to update boundaries based on climate impacts, and provide baseline info for a more thorough EFH review.
4. Communities ID and expansion: identify communities, including those potentially underserved; develop a communications plan for underserved and potentially expanded communities; support town hall meetings; expand Cit Sci and BFP efforts northward based on stock shifts.

Projects were selected largely based on implementation workload considerations and comments from NMFS on the initial submissions. Much of the work ties in with efforts of the other Atlantic Councils to make progress in the scenario planning effort.

The initial funding is expected to be available by April 2024. Additional funding will not likely be available until summer 2024.

### **Stakeholder Meetings Planning**

Council staff is working to develop a plan for holding stakeholder engagement meetings along the South Atlantic coast, meeting fishermen in their communities. These stakeholder engagement meetings will provide an opportunity for Council members to have productive dialogues with fisheries participants, building relationships and momentum for participation in the management process. As part of the “Communities Identification and Expansion” IRA proposal, staff included money to hire an outside facilitator who will aid in development of the meetings and follow-up after the initial round in Winter 2025. Staff intend to bring together the Council planning team for this project in Spring 2024 to get feedback on the proposed structure for these meetings. Finally, staff would like input from the Council on what outreach support states would be able to provide and if Council members are comfortable with visiting two states per year on a rotating basis (ex. North Carolina and Georgia one year, South Carolina and Florida the next year).

## Citizen Science

- SAFMC Release
  - The SAFMC Release 2023 Data Summary is complete! It has been shared with project participants and will be available on the SAFMC Release webpage at the end of February 2024.
  - The SAFMC Release Participant Recognition Program's 2024 milestones have been shared with participants and are available online at the following link: <https://safmc.net/documents/2024-prp-milestones-pdf/>.
  - The 2024 milestones include a collaboration with Sea Grant's Best Fishing Practices initiative.
  - Data collection, recruitment, and retention efforts continued for the SAFMC Release Project. Outreach activities have included monthly newsletters, social media posts, collaborating with the Best Fishing Practices (BFP) campaign and Sea Grant Reef Fish Fellow on tackle shop outreach in the FL Keys, a seminar focused on BFP and SAFMC Release in Marathon, FL hosted by the Tackle Box, and a headboat media trip in Key West to gather BFP and SAFMC Release content.
  - The Citizen Science and BFP teams led efforts to coordinate and participate in the FL Keys Seafood Festival, Haddrell's Fishing Expo in Charleston, SC, and the Saltwater Sportsman National Seminar Series featuring George Poveromo in Wilmington, NC and Port St. Lucie, FL. At these events, Council staff manned a booth focused on BFP and SAFMC Release. Additionally, at the Haddrell's Expo, Citizen Science and BFP personnel collaborated with local captains on a seminar focused on bottom fishing, BFP, and SAFMC Release.
- SciFish
  - Beta testing for the SciFish platform continues and will wrap up in the upcoming months. Forward progress is being made on the account creation options that will be available in the platform (e.g., SAFIS 'manager approved' accounts and non-SAFIS 'auto approved' accounts). In January 2024, ACCSP put out a call for applicants for the SciFish Advisory Panel (SAP) which will provide oversight to the SciFish platform. Citizen Science staff have applied to serve on the SAP. The SciFish webpage on ACCSP's website will be live in February 2024, and ACCSP will be accepting the first SciFish pre-applications from project PI's in April 2024.
- FISHstory
  - The FY24 ACCSP proposal submitted in collaboration with North Carolina State University and the Southeast Fisheries Science Center to continue and expand the FISHstory project was accepted for funding. This will provide funding for the project through June 2025.
  - Thanks to efforts from our partners, Advisory Panel (AP) members, and scanning events held last fall, ~ 650 new photos were digitized and archived for the FISHstory project. Photo collection via scanning events was most productive via AP meetings and through AP members helping connect staff to other individuals, organizations, and/or businesses within their communities. The FISHstory team

are currently reviewing the newly archived photos to identify those that are appropriate for analysis and those that are helpful for informational content, project promotion, and/or training materials.

- The FISHstory team has worked to refine the workflow and training materials in Zooniverse based on lessons learned through the pilot project. We are hoping to beta test the new protocol with Zooniverse ‘gold-star’ volunteers in the next month and re-launch the project in Zooniverse this spring.
- The FISHstory team has refined the length protocol developed during the pilot project. Training sessions were held with length analysts and length measurements on Red Snapper are underway for photos in the current FISHstory archive.
- SMILE
  - Staff have continued meeting monthly with the SMILE Core project team. The citizen science version of the handheld laser-mounted camera (SMILE camera) was field tested during late summer and fall 2023. Length data collected with the SMILE camera will be compared with traditional stereovideo cameras and roving visual census surveys collected during the same field-testing efforts. Analysis for data collected during 2023 is underway. Opportunistic 2024 field testing in collaboration with other REEF events has begun and planning for the 2024 SMILE field testing is underway. REEF is continuing to collaborate with University of California San Diego (UCSD) Engineers for Exploration and Scripps Institution of Oceanography to refine the SMILE camera’s design. Coordination has begun with SECOORA and Axiom Data Science for the data storage and management component of the project.
  - Project partners have continued to share information on the project via social media platforms and webpages. Through these efforts NOAA’s Coral Reef Conservation Program reached out to develop a feature story on the SMILE project.
  - Additionally, the SMILE team is exploring incorporation of social science efforts into the project to better understand motivations and barriers of potential volunteers.
- Staff continued to work with researchers Rick Bonney, Jennifer Sweeney-Tookes, Tracy Yandle, and Bryan Fluech on the Citizen Science Program’s initial evaluation. Bonney has finalized and pilot tested the online survey for managers and scientists with the target to launch the survey in February 2024. Sweeney-Tookes, Yandle, and Fluech have completed four research trips for the geographic segments included in these efforts. Interviews with fishermen are almost complete. Transcription of the completed interviews is approximately halfway done, and preliminary data analysis has started. Both project components are on track to be complete in June 2024.
- Citizen Science staff participated in a session focused on citizen science during the January 2024 NOAA Fisheries Recreational Coordinators’ meeting held in Charleston, SC. Staff gave a presentation on the Council’s Citizen Science Program and projects and participated in a panel discussion with other NOAA Fisheries colleagues working in this area.

## **Website and Digital Communications Updates**

- Archived all Advisory Panel Briefing Books dating back to 2010. Now ALL meeting briefing books are archived and searchable on the website.
- Phased out Wufoo public commenting application and archived comments collected over its existence.
- Website development; began rehabbing habitat webpage,
- “What It Means To Me” project development and editing.
- Continued general website maintenance.
- Continued public comment upkeep.
- Continued social media management.
- Continued FishRules updates and management.

## **Coral 10 Resubmission**

Council staff and SERO staff have estimated that the Coral 10 resubmission process will involve two IPT meetings and two weeks of staff time dedicated to research and rewriting the following subjects: bycatch analysis, impacts to EFH, economic environment and analysis, and clarifying the goals and objectives to be more congruous with the Coral FMP.

## **Allocations Review**

Council staff were notified in February 2024 that the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has closed out both recommendations for their report: *South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Councils Would Benefit from Documented Processes for Allocation Reviews* (GAO-20-216/March 2020).

A dedicated webpage provides details on the Council’s tools and processes to address allocation reviews: <https://safmc.net/fishery-management/sector-allocations/>

## **NOAA Recreational Coordinators Meeting**

The NOAA Recreational Coordinators met in Charleston January 30 – February 1. This was an annual gathering of the nationwide coordinators and several Council staff were invited to present on South Atlantic topics. Julia Byrd gave an overview of the Council’s Citizen Science program. John Carmichael and Chip Collier, along with Amy Dukes of SC DNR, presented on regional challenges and differences in state-federal programs.

## **Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Blueprint**

There was some progress on revising the fisheries Memorandum of Understanding during January, with a workgroup of Council (GMFMC and SAFMC), FL FWC, and FKNMS staff working to update the document to reflect current practices and agencies. The MOU also includes a definition and listing of traditional fisheries that are important to allowing fishing activity to continue. Once the MOU is revised it will be brought to the Council for review. However, due to some developments regarding authority in FL state waters the process has been delayed and the availability for review is unknown at this time.

### **National Academies Committee on the Distribution of Fisheries Management Benefits**

In early 2023, the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine created an ad hoc committee to determine what data and information are required to assess whether the distribution of federal fisheries management benefits is equitable. Specifically, the Committee is tasked with determining the categories of information required, what information current exists and what needs to be collected, obstacles to that collection, and methodologies that can be used to assess the distribution of benefits. On August 14, 2023 staff from the regional councils were invited to provide presentations detailing their perspectives on the Committee's tasks. The final report with the Committee's finding and recommendations was released on February 8<sup>th</sup> and can be found here: <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/27313/assessing-equity-in-the-distribution-of-fisheries-management-benefits-data>

### **Western Central Atlantic Fishery Commission (WECAFC) Flyingfish-Dolphinfish Working Group Meeting**

The first meeting of the WECAFC Flyingfish-Dolphinfish Working Group is scheduled to meet in Puerto Rico from June 4-5, 2024. The meeting is likely to be broadly focused on developing items such as terms of reference, scope of work, and outlining potential next steps for the group. The Council will be updated later this year on progress of the working group. If there are questions or concerns that Council members would like to relay to the U.S. delegates ahead of the meeting, please reach out to John Hadley ([john.hadley@safmc.net](mailto:john.hadley@safmc.net)). All questions and comments received will be compiled and forwarded.