

SUMMARY REPORT

Outreach and Communications Advisory Panel Meeting

October 9-10, 2024

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's [Outreach and Communications Advisory Panel](#) (AP) met October 9-10, 2024, in North Charleston, SC.

The AP approved the agenda for the meeting and opportunities for public input were provided. No verbal or written comments were provided. Following introductions and welcome by Tom Roller, Chair of the Council's Outreach and Communications Committee, and Scott Baker, AP Chair, the AP reviewed the following agenda items and provided recommendations:

AP Member Share

AP members were asked to share their recent experiences and information relative to outreach efforts related to federal fisheries in the region.

- *Caribbean Fishery Management Council (Cristina Olan – CFMC)*
Cristina provided an update on recent outreach efforts including social media, Underutilized Species Campaign working with Sea Grant and well-recognized chefs; the [BigFish Initiative](#) focusing on the protection of spawning aggregations in the Caribbean, and the Marine Resources Education Program (MREP) in the Caribbean. A new video developed by the Council promoting best fishing practices was shared at the end of the meeting and well received by the AP.
- *Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council – (Emily Muehlstein – GMFMC)*
Emily provided a Powerpoint presentation highlighting current events, but was unable to attend the AP meeting due to Hurricane Milton. Highlights include a summary of the CCC Communications Workgroup 2024 meeting, Recreational Initiative, and a recently developed [History of Management Timeline Tool](#).
- *Descending Device Outreach Coordination Team – (Ashley Oliver – SAFMC Staff)*
provided an update on the activities of the multi-agency team created in 2022 to increase communication between agencies in the Southeast regarding the use of descending devices and best fishing practices. This includes the “Donuts and Descending Devices” special outreach event held for the third year at [ICAST 2024](#), the world’s largest recreational fishing trade show.
- *Other:* AP member Trish Smith with NCDMF noted [pending state requirements](#) for recreational angler reporting and associated agency challenges; Lt. Andrew Loeffler provided an update on US Coast Guard activities, including increased funding; and updates were provided by AP members from Sea Grant. Jocelyn Juliano with SC Sea Grant noted the [South Atlantic Red Snapper Research Program](#) has been extended to Fall 2026. Matt Perkinson with SCDNR shared information about collaboration efforts with the Port Royal Sound Foundation and Angler’s Catch to collect data, including over 800 lengths on released fish during a tournament held this fall.

Best Fishing Practices, Sea Grant Fellowship, and Citizen Science

Council staff provided updates on programs and outreach efforts associated with the following:

- **General Update on Best Fishing Practices (BFP) and SAFMC Release Program Outreach** Council staff provided the AP with an overview of goals and objectives and outreach efforts associated with partnering the Council’s Best Fishing Practices (BFP) program and the Citizen Science project SAFMC Release. Overlapping outreach efforts include tackle shop visits, participation in fishing seminars, expos, and industry events, targeted mailings, and media charter trips.

Staff also provided details on individual programs, including the new **BFP Master Volunteer Program (MVP)**, program materials, and recent [BFP MVP workshops](#). Also updates on the **SAFMC Release Program**. These include partnering with state agencies for recruitment mailings, scheduled social media posts, and content creation trips offshore to gather photos and video to be used for [SAFMC Release](#) promotion. Staff provided updates on increases in program participation and retention.

AP Feedback:

- Shark depredation continues to be a concern. Consider messaging through BFP that shark depredation is less likely with use of a descending device.
- Consider providing tackle shops a list of items that should be readily available from their stores to encourage BFP, e.g., descending devices, non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks, coated dip nets, etc. Some AP members noted difficulty in finding these items in some tackle shops, notably the type of required circle hooks.
- Content and materials within BFP MVP should be considered as part of any private recreational permit requirement.
- Overall AP support for the programs and for continued outreach, especially in-person communication.

- **Sea Grant Reef Fish Fellowship Update**

The AP was introduced to Greyson Webb, the new Sea Grant Fellow who provided an overview of ongoing outreach activities (tackle shop visits, seminars and events, and media tours) and new activities to address limitations of in-person outreach, focusing on media/press outreach and audience analysis.

AP Feedback:

- Consider a more targeted audience than “offshore anglers”.
- Figure out the information you want from this targeted audience in conducting the analysis.
- Consider audience and tools for communication. Sea Grant showed a continued reliance on printed materials 5 years ago. Continued reliance of online information today.
- AP experience with surveys – “you can’t give participants what they want – they want more fish.”
- AP supports continued partnering with tackle shops.
- Tailor pitches for specific audiences – Grayson noted she has drafted five different “packages” for promotion.

- Suggest having pitch for American Sportfishing Association (ASA) Annual Summit.
- Note that the Return ‘Em Right Program has a media tool kit that would be a great resource.
- **Citizen Science Program Update**
Council staff provided updates on the Council’s Citizen Science Program that included a new online portal (CitSci Project Idea Portal) stakeholders can use to share project ideas with the Program, ongoing program evaluation, and updates on the SMILE Project, the SciFish platform that houses the SAFMC Release Project, and the FISHstory Project. AP members were asked to provide input on the FISHstory project and CitSci Project Idea Portal.

AP Feedback:

- Recommended additional strategies to gather new historic photos for FISHstory and to promote the FISHstory project in Zooniverse:
 - Compiling new photos:
 - Consider targeting larger inland communities with strong interests in saltwater fishing (e.g., Atlanta, Raleigh), national history museums, and Association of Zoos and Aquariums.
 - NCDMF may have additional photos to share. Will coordinate with staff.
 - Promoting project in Zooniverse:
 - Consider promoting via American Fishery Society meetings and chapters.
 - SC Wildlife Federation willing to host a webinar in April 2025.
 - SCDNR may be able to promote through their saltwater email listserve
- CitSci Project Idea Portal:
 - Staff noted the importance of including fishermen’s input on project ideas for the Citizen Science Program.
 - AP noted the continued shark predation issue could be used to spark interest in project idea solicitation.
 - AP noted importance of managing expectations when stakeholders submit ideas and transparency about how the submitted ideas would be used by the Program.

Digital Communications Update

Council staff provided the AP with updates on digital media and communications, including analytics for website, a possible FAQ page on the website, and social media use. AP members also reviewed the Council’s new “[What it Means to Me](#)” video project highlighting stories from fishermen to improve relationships between the Council and fishermen, received an update on the Council Coordinating Committee Communications Workgroup meeting and proposed efforts to promote the 50th anniversary of the regional fishery management councils, development of a new “how to” guide for making motions to be used by regional fishery management councils,

and a new video recently used for outreach purposes highlighting the SAFMC and management process.

AP Feedback:

- Positive feedback from the AP on both the website and use of social media, including use of “stories” during the Council meeting weeks.
 - Emphasis on featuring more women on socials as a response to broadening our constituent base.
 - Consider using AP members and scientists for social media messaging – note the Caribbean Council has been successful with this approach.
 - Website traffic spikes during meetings, but very few show up to give public comment. Questions on how to convert this interest into attendance.
 - Comment that triggerfish may have high website traffic because gag is closed.
- AP support for Regulations FAQ page on website
 - Note the page to include aggregate bag limits, mackerel zones, descending device requirements, state versus federal, and charter requirements.
 - AP suggested including broader “gear requirements”.
 - Consider breaking down regulations by sector
 - Include rationale for restrictions, e.g., “Why is there an annual shallow water grouper closure”.
- Overall support for the What it Means to Me Project
 - Expand the universe of targeted interviews – the “snapshot” of communities.
 - Include women and other minorities.
 - Highlight the project via a feature article.
 - Consider repurposing videos in reels and other short videos.

Habitat Blueprint Update

Council staff provided an overview of the previous AP recommendations regarding the Habitat Blueprint and associated outreach efforts to promote the Council’s efforts relative habitat management. Staff noted updates to the Council’s Habitat webpage and the recent feature article on Habitat. The AP approved the outreach and communication questions for the Habitat and ecosystem AP, and provided suggestions to create an FAQ about habitat and council limitations regarding the protection of habitat. The AP also suggested that the Habitat and Ecosystem scientist consider attending the following meetings to increase knowledge and improve networking: Benthic Ecology meeting, Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute (GCFI), Association for the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography (ASLO), and Coastal and Estuarine Research Foundation (CERF).

2024 Mackerel Port Meeting Update

The AP received an update on the [Mackerel Port Meetings](#) held along the Atlantic coast in 2024 from Council staff and provided recommendations for presenting the gathered information to the Council and stakeholders.

AP Feedback:

- Explore areas where the results are unexpected, especially when related to differences or similarities between commercial and recreational sectors, the northern and southern regions, and the king and Spanish mackerel fisheries themselves.
- Conduct an exploratory sentiment analysis to help characterize the current state of each fishery.

2025 Stakeholder Meetings

Council staff provided an overview on a series of [Stakeholder Engagement Meetings](#) planned by the Council in 2025. Staff provided the goals and objectives, logistics, structure, outreach plans, and ideas for evaluation, along with an explanation of how the information gathered will be used. AP members were asked to provide input on additional outreach avenues for publicizing the meetings, encourage stakeholder attendance, and evaluation.

AP Feedback:

- The Council should market these meetings as an opportunity for extended discussion with Council members. Fishermen often feel like their voices are not being heard and this is an opportunity the Council created to try and better communicate with stakeholders.
 - It will be important to show the value of fishermen input in the management process by providing specific examples of where their input has directly influenced a management decision.
 - It would be beneficial to communicate the value of similar efforts, such as Snapper Grouper Visioning, Mackerel Port Meetings, and the Best Fishing Practices Master Volunteer Program.
- This effort should be called something other than a “meeting” to help it stand out from other Council public input opportunities.
- A pre-meeting survey could be administered to better understand what fishermen want to get out of the meeting, but also as an icebreaker to help attendees feel more comfortable providing input later in the meeting.
 - Could ask if they have ever attended a Council meeting or public comment opportunity prior to tonight.
- Consider stepping away from the more structured breakout groups and prioritizing the unstructured sections, holding the unstructured session first, or doing two unstructured sessions. The goal should be to use unstructured sessions to help attendees become comfortable in the meeting environment.
- The OC AP suggested that Council members be the ones responsible for pushing out information on these meetings. Consider **who** you really want to attend these meetings and then have Council members personally reach out.
- Utilizing social media will be important, including collaboration with influencers on social media or even having Council members put together a sizzle reel telling viewers what the meetings will be about and encouraging them to attend.
 - Look into adding attendees to a WhatsApp group that would allow staff to send them text notifications on events, public input opportunities, etc.
 - Post stories on social media in real time and include links with information on the topics being discussed during the meeting.

- Emphasize the fact that Council members will be in attendance and participating in running the meeting as opposed to just staff.

AP Members in Attendance

Scott Baker, Chair
BeBe Dalton Harrison
Bryan Fluech
Jocelyn Juliano
Lt. Andrew Loeffler
Christina Olan
Matt Perkinson
Mark Phelps
Patricia Smith

AP Members Attending via Webinar

George Patane

Staff Lead: Kim Iverson