



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

South Atlantic Stakeholder Engagement Meetings

Discussion Document

June 2024

Background

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. This is occurring against a backdrop of increasing demands on everyone’s time and an upheaval in traditional ways of interacting with the public. Moreover, climate change imposes challenges to ecosystems, stocks, and fisheries on scales of both time and space that may be incompatible with established fishery information systems. While Participatory Science, Citizen Science, and local ecological knowledge are used as ways of improving the resolution and timeliness of the decision-making information available to the Council, stakeholders must be willing to get involved for these techniques to succeed. New ways of interacting with stakeholders are needed to address declining confidence and improve the ability of the Council to address developing challenges.

To that end, Council staff has begun work to develop a plan for holding stakeholder engagement meetings along the south Atlantic coast, meeting fishermen in their communities. The traditional public comment format does not always allow for two-way discourse between Council members and fisheries stakeholders. These stakeholder engagement meetings 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 process require consistent

interaction with stakeholders over time, so staff intend for these types of meetings to become a regular part of the Council’s engagement efforts. The tentative goal is to hold the first round of stakeholder engagement meetings in early-2025 to avoid overlap with other stakeholder-driven efforts (mackerel port meetings, MSEs, etc.)

Goals and Objectives

Overall Goal: Build relationships with fishery stakeholders by engaging them in an informal setting that allows for two-way conversations.

- **Objective One:** Provide an opportunity for an **open dialogue** and **mutual learning** between Council members and stakeholders.
 - Building trust, improving communication, and fostering mutual respect.
- **Objective Two:** **Increase knowledge** of the fisheries management process to encourage stakeholder engagement in Council initiatives.
 - Provide stakeholders tools to help them confidently participate in the management process.
 - Increase involvement in public comment, advisory panels, the Citizen Science Program, and other Council initiatives.
- **Objective Three:** Provide a mechanism for stakeholders to **bring their concerns and observations forward**, directly to Council members.
 - Gather input to potentially inform proactive management action.
 - Provide Council members with information helpful for setting their workload priorities.
- **Objective Four:** Provide an opportunity for Council members to **share information** on salient management issues with stakeholders.
 - Allow Council members to discuss challenging management topics with stakeholders.

Objectives for this Meeting

- Review input from the Council Sub-Group meeting, **included in purple throughout the document.**
- Discuss how the Council would use the information gathered from Stakeholder Engagement Meetings in the management process.
- Discuss how to incentivize attendance at the Stakeholder Engagement Meetings.
- Review the proposed Stakeholder Engagement Meeting structure and provide recommendations.
- Review past meeting location information and recommend locations for the first set of Stakeholder Engagement Meetings.

“What is the Council going to do with information gathered during stakeholder meetings?”

These meetings are not tied to a specific management action. It will be important to communicate to stakeholders how the input gathered will be used, the benefits of attending these meetings, and the opportunities they provide that traditional meeting processes may not provide.

To answer the above question, it is important for Council members to consider what they want to get out of these meetings.

Comments from the Social and Economic Panel:

- The SEP had a lengthy discussion about the ultimate goals and outcomes of the meetings, and stressed the importance of identifying what will be done with the information gathered, noting that attendees may want something tangible as a result and that the goal of establishing communication (while important) may not be enough to bring people to the room. SEP also noted the importance of setting expectations, and educating about what is and isn't within the Council's power to change/act upon.
- SEP discussed incentives, noting that the opportunity to talk face-to-face with the Council may recruit some, but may not be enough of an incentive for all.

Questions for the Council:

1. While a report will be produced following each meeting, stakeholders are going to want to understand *how* the Council will use the information provided in management. Where could this information fit in the management process? Is there specific information desired from stakeholder engagement meetings?
 - a. **The Council could use the information provided during stakeholder engagement meetings to help set workload priorities.**
 - i. **It would be important to get input from meeting attendees on the Council's workplan.**
 - b. **In addition to the workplan, the Council could use input from stakeholder engagement meetings to identify topics that should be addressed by the Council as well as what types of questions should be discussed when considering management actions.**
 - c. **Information gathered during stakeholder engagement meetings should be presented to the Council before each relevant Committee.**

2. How can the Council encourage attendance at stakeholder engagement meetings given that the opportunity to communicate with managers may not be sufficient incentive, especially if trying to engage stakeholders not already involved in the Council process?
 - a. **Stakeholder engagement meetings could be advertised as an opportunity to submit a Council “report card.”**
 - i. **Structuring a feedback portion at the beginning may allow attendees to air their frustrations at the beginning of the meeting allowing for more productive conversations to occur during the rest of the meeting.**
 - ii. **How to facilitate this type of discussion in a productive manner will take additional thought.**
 - b. **It will be important to consider stakeholder burnout given the number of public input and participation opportunities.**

DRAFT Meeting Structure

Pre-Meeting Logistics:

- Five Council staff members would attend each meeting along with all three of the Council members that represent each state.
- Specific topics to be discussed will be decided upon by meeting with state-specific Council members and staff to determine which topics are most salient for a given state or city and for each sector. The goal would be to keep consistency in topics across the state and region, if possible.
- There will be a pre-meeting training session so that staff and Council members are comfortable with their role and responsibilities during each stakeholder engagement meeting.

Total Meeting Time: **2 hours**

Prologue (~30 minutes):

- As attendees arrive for the evening, they will be greeted and asked about why they decided to attend and what they hope to get out of the night’s stakeholder meeting.

Introduction (~15 minutes):

- A very brief presentation will be given by a Council member to welcome attendees, explain the Council’s goals and objectives for stakeholder engagement meetings and how the night will operate.

Chapter I: Structured Breakout Groups (~50 minutes):

- Attendees will be separated into two different breakout groups to have discussions on the pre-selected topics. A Council member will provide a brief synopsis of the topic and ask one or two pre-prepared questions to get conversation flowing. Each group will have the opportunity to discuss both topics.

Intermission (~10 minutes):

- A quick break for casual conversations and to allow staff to reset the room for the next part of the evening.

Chapter II: Unstructured Breakout Groups (~30 minutes):

***Prior to the start of this session, Council members will note the key points from each of the structured breakout groups and that should attendees want to stick around for more discussion after the meeting ends at 8p, staff and Council members will stick around to chat. ***

- Tables or stations on different topics will be set up around the room. A Council member and/or staff will be at each station to chat with attendees and answer questions on specific topics. Attendees will be able to move about the room freely based on topics of interest to them. Example stations include Management 101, Citizen Science, Shadow Shark Amendment 23, etc.

Conclusion (~15 minutes):

- A very brief presentation will be given by a Council member to thank attendees, recap the Council's goals and objectives, and note where the information goes next.

Post Meeting Logistics:

- Council members and staff that attended the meeting will hold a debrief the following morning to discuss what was learned during the meeting, key takeaways, and ways to improve future meetings.
- A summary report of the meeting will be prepared and Council members in attendance will present what they learned during the next full Council meeting.
- Staff will follow up with meeting attendees in the following ways:
 - Thank you email to all attendees, a bullet point list of some things learned, and information on upcoming Council meetings and opportunities for participation.
 - Once prepared the summary report will be sent to attendees to allow them the opportunity to review.

Questions for the Council:

1. Are there any general comments, edits, or suggested additions to the overall meeting structure?
 - a. **Consider tailoring the number of stations during the unstructured session to the number of staff and Council member attendees at a given meeting.**
 - b. **Informal conversations are an important part of building relationships, so consider prioritizing the unstructured session.**
 - i. **Each state could discuss and decide how long to make the structured vs. unstructured session.**
2. Are there other pre-meeting logistics that should be considered to ensure participating Council members are comfortable with their roles and responsibilities?
 - a. **Facilitation training for Council members may be helpful.**
 - b. **One page synopsis ahead of time for each topic, including discussion questions to help get conversation flowing.**

3. How do you envision Council members being involved in facilitating breakout group discussions? Do you feel Council members will be comfortable facilitating breakout groups with the help of staff?
 - a. **Yes, Council members would be comfortable facilitating breakout groups so long as staff was present to help answer any questions.**
4. Are the meetings set up in a way that provides opportunities to achieve the goals/objectives (e.g. enough opportunities to have two-way conversations with stakeholders, share information, learn from stakeholders)?
 - **It is important that the meeting includes an opportunity for the attendees to bring up new topics and ideas.**
 - **Working with advisory panel members will be important for a number of reasons, including identifying topics of interest, encouraging attendance, and aiding in discussion during the meetings.**
 - **It should be made clear from the outset that these meetings are meant to be forward-looking.**

Meeting Location Information

- Meetings will be held during the winter months when fishing levels tend to be lower.
- Two states will host meetings a year with the other two states hosting meetings the subsequent year.
 - Each state will have a week’s worth of stakeholder engagement meetings (aka four meetings or less).
 - Stakeholder engagement meetings will be held every year, rotating between the two sets of states.

Table 1. Meeting cities and venues used for Snapper Grouper Visioning port meetings.

State	City	Date	Attendees	Time	Locations
North Carolina	Shalotte	3/17/14	18	130pm	
	Southport	3/17/14	16	10am	
	Sneads Ferry	3/18/14	27	1pm	
	Morehead City	3/19/14	30	11am	Sanitary Restaurant
	Raleigh	3/19/14	11	6pm	Raleigh Country Club
	Hatteras	3/20/14	4	3pm	Hatteras Community Center
	Wanchese	3/21/14	9	10am	Wanchese Community Center
South Carolina	Murrells Inlet	02/11/14	8	2pm	
	Murrells Inlet	02/11/14	19	6pm	
	Charleston	02/17/14	17	6pm	Haddrell's West Ashley
	Bluffton	02/18/14	6	6pm	Waddell Mariculture Center
	Columbia	02/20/14	0		
Georgia	Savannah	04/14/14	20	6pm	
	Brunswick	04/15/14			
	St. Simons	04/15/14	7	10am	

State	City	Date	Attendees	Time	Locations
	St. Simons	04/15/14	14	6pm	
	Shellman Bluff	04/16/14	23	8am	
Florida	St. Augustine	3/25/14			
	Lake Park	3/26/14			
	Titusville	3/26/14			
	Key West	3/31/14	11	4pm	Gato Building
	Marathon	4/1/14	9	4pm	Key Fisheries
	Key Largo	4/2/14	21	4pm	Key Largo Fisheries

Questions for the Council:

1. Where should the first set of stakeholder engagement meetings be held? Should North Carolina and Georgia and South Carolina and Florida be paired together (different areas of the coast), or should North Carolina and South Carolina and Georgia and Florida be paired together (less travel distance)?
 - a. **Support holding meetings in two states each year. Suggestions to hold North Carolina and South Carolina first, followed by Georgia and Florida.**
 - b. Which cities or towns within those states should be considered? Especially, considering travel logistics and areas that don't often have the opportunity for face-to-face interactions with Council members.
 - i. **North Carolina: Continue meeting in the three key areas (southern, central, Outer Banks) but within cities consider location, such as meeting in southern Wilmington instead of northern Wilmington.**
 - ii. **South Carolina: McClellanville, Murrell's Inlet/Little River, Beaufort.**
 - iii. **Georgia: Shellman's Bluff (centrally located).**
 - iv. **General discussion of holding meetings at locations further inshore such as Raleigh, Columbia, or Atlanta.**
 1. **Concerned that this would be a primarily recreational crowd with little commercial representation.**
 - a. **For all meetings it will be important to note the number of attendees from each sector.**
 2. **It could be an opportunity to hear more from the restaurant industry.**
 3. **Meetings held inland have not historically been well attended.**
2. Should meetings be held in the evening as is traditional or at a different time of day?
 - a. **Recommendation to continue holding meetings in the evening when the majority of stakeholders can attend, and meetings are likely to have attendees from multiple sectors.**
 - b. **Note that Snapper Grouper Visioning meetings held during the day were because of venue restrictions and primarily attended by non-governmental organizations.**
3. Are there preferences on the types of facilities used to hold stakeholder engagement meetings?

- a. **Consider the social dynamics of certain venues (fish houses, tackle shops, etc.) and aim to use locations that are neutral.**
 - i. **Hotels are okay, but could also consider schools, community centers, YMCAs, county parks, agricultural centers, etc.**