



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

South Atlantic Stakeholder Engagement Meetings

Council Discussion Document

December 2023

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 relationships and increase engagement in the management process. Building relationships and momentum for participation in the management process requires 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. Council leadership was briefed on the concept in early 2023 and was supportive of Council staff’s request to develop these meetings.

For stakeholder engagement meetings to successfully build relationships, **Council member attendance and participation will be essential, and all Council members will be expected to attend these meetings in-person when held in their state.** The meetings will not be formatted like traditional public comment efforts. Instead, they will involve facilitated discussions with stakeholders. Specific discussion topics could vary based on what is salient at the time and place. Additionally, topics could be adjusted as meeting participants identify their reason for attending. Finally, following each meeting, staff and Council members in attendance could debrief on what was learned, followed by a report to the entire Council at their next meeting.

“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

Objectives for this Meeting

- Review draft goals and objectives for stakeholder engagement meetings.
- Clarify Council member roles and expectations for the stakeholder engagement meetings.
- Approve tentative timeline for stakeholder engagement meetings.
- Gather volunteers to participate on the stakeholder engagement planning team (one member per state).

DRAFT 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.

COUNCIL ACTION

REVIEW GOALS AND OBJECTIVES, MODIFY AS NEEDED.

Tentative Timeline

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.)

Date		Development of Stakeholder Engagement Meetings
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	March 2023	Senior staff discuss the development of stakeholder engagement meetings with Council leadership and get approval to begin development.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	August 2023	Staff planning team meets and begins to discuss goals and objectives, and timing for stakeholder meetings.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	September 2023	Stakeholder engagement meetings are noted during the September Council meeting staff report with more information to come at the December 2023 meeting.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Fall 2023	Staff discusses goals and objectives for stakeholder engagement meetings and drafts a document for review at the December 2023 Council meeting.
<input type="checkbox"/>	December 2023	Council discusses their goals and objectives for stakeholder engagement meetings and provides input on draft document. Council member volunteers requested for planning team.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Winter 2024	Staff and planning team draft a structure for stakeholder engagement meetings.
<input type="checkbox"/>	March 2024	Council provides comments on proposed stakeholder engagement meeting structure.

Date		Development of Stakeholder Engagement Meetings
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spring 2024	Stakeholder engagement meetings discussed with spring advisory panels. Staff works on finalizing meeting structure and begins discussing evaluation and outreach needs.
<input type="checkbox"/>	June 2024	Council reviews input from spring advisory panels, and draft evaluation and outreach methods.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Summer 2024	Staff finalizes all aspects of stakeholder engagement meetings plan for Council review and advisory panel run-throughs.
<input type="checkbox"/>	September 2024	Fully drafted plan (structure, schedule, evaluation, etc.) presented to the Council.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Fall 2024	Practice stakeholder engagement meetings with scheduled fall advisory panels.
<input type="checkbox"/>	December 2024	Council approves the final stakeholder engagement meeting plan for implementation in Winter 2025 and discusses initial meeting topics.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Winter 2025	Stakeholder Meetings Begin.

COUNCIL ACTION

REVIEW DRAFT TIMELINE AND PROVIDE INPUT, AS NEEDED.

Stakeholder Engagement Planning Team

As noted above, Council member participation in stakeholder engagement meetings will be essential to their success and staff would like Council members to be closely involved in the meeting development process. To that end, staff recommend forming a stakeholder engagement planning team, allowing for more regular Council member input outside of regularly scheduled Council meetings.

Council Staff	Position
Christina Wiegand	Fishery Social Scientist
John Carmichael	Executive Director
Myra Brouwer	Deputy Director for Management
Allie Iberle	Fishery Scientist
Mike Schmidtke	Fishery Scientist
Nick Smillie	Digital Media & Communications Specialist
Julia Byrd	Citizen Science Program Manager
Council Members	State Represented
TBD	North Carolina
TBD	South Carolina
TBD	Georgia
TBD	Florida

COUNCIL ACTION

APPROVE STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PLANNING TEAM AND APPOINT A COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVE FROM EACH STATE.