

What It Means to Me

A project highlighting the stories of fishermen in the South Atlantic.

Background

Building and sustaining trust with fishermen has long been a challenge for fisheries managers. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) has made ongoing investments in its outreach program to increase communication with stakeholders and build trust and confidence in management actions. As a recent example, the Council has implemented an intensive Best Fishing Practices campaign to promote the use of best fishing practices for the snapper grouper fishery and involvement in the fisheries management process. However, the lack of confidence with the data and management process remains a problem in the fishing community and limits the effectiveness of communication and education efforts. Council staff have created the ‘What It Means to Me’ project as an additional, novel method to improve relationships between fishermen and the Council and to promote more involvement in the management process.

Purpose and Focus

Fostering positive relationships within the fishing community is a long-term process that requires regular interaction with stakeholders over a significant period. The ‘What It Means to Me’ project aims to help bridge the trust gap by elevating participants’ voices on Council platforms including but not limited to, social media (short video stories, YouTube), an ArcGIS StoryMap, the Council website, and through other Council programs such as the Best Fishing Practices Master Volunteer Program (BFP MVP) and SAFMC Release.

Informal, short conversations with fishermen, focusing on what their fishery means to them and how the use of best fishing practices supports the future of their fishery, will be filmed and edited. Conversation topics may include how the participant began fishing, why it is important that their fishery is preserved, involvement in SAFMC Release and FISHstory, habitat, perspectives on changes in the fishery, and advice to fellow fishermen. Photos and video footage of their boats, fishing activities, and/or businesses may be taken by staff or received from participants to create a visually appealing video. The length of each conversation product will vary by topic and dissemination platform with none exceeding five minutes. Participants will need to sign a release form that details how the images and video footage may be used. Participants will have the chance to review their video before dissemination.

Conversation Topics

- How participant began fishing
 - Memories of learning how to fish, role models, inspiration
- Importance of fishery preservation
- How their fishery can be preserved
 - Best fishing practices that can be used
- Involvement in SAFMC Release and FISHstory

- Role in fisheries management, how you got to the position you are in now
- Habitat
- Perspectives on changes in the fishery
- Advice to fellow fishermen
- Additional topics
 - Preferred target species

Possible B-roll from Participants

- Old and current pictures and videos
- Active fishing
- Boat(s)
- Businesses

Target Audiences

Research shows fishermen receive trusted fishing information from their peers and local tackle shops (*Southeast Florida and South Carolina Anglers' Release Practices and Their Attitudes Toward Descending Devices 2022*). As such, the target audience for this project will include well-respected members of the South Atlantic fishing community. This includes all sectors (commercial, private recreational, and for-hire) that focus on federal finfish fisheries such as snapper grouper, dolphin wahoo, and mackerel cobia.

Goals

1. Help bridge the trust gap between the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and fishermen.
2. Encourage the preservation of South Atlantic fisheries by using best fishing practices in everyday fishing activities.
3. Increase involvement in the fisheries management process and programs, e.g., advisory panels, attending Council meetings, making public comment, SAFMC Release, and the Best Fishing Practices Master Volunteer Program.
4. Document the stories of those involved in South Atlantic fisheries in a constructive manner.

Conclusion

Given the challenges faced in building trust with fishermen and the importance of such trust to successful outreach and education, additional outreach tactics are needed to increase fishermen involvement and improve their perceptions and relationship with the fisheries management process. The 'What It Means to Me' project will capture the voice and backstory of fishermen involved in the South Atlantic fisheries management process to share with others and help bridge the trust gap between fishing communities and fishery management agencies and encourage more fishermen to be involved. Information is often better received from trusted members of the community, therefore sharing their personal stories and best fishing practices information through Council platforms will not only help improve trust and participation in the fishery management process but also increase the use of best fishing practices.