

Meeting Report
Outreach and Communications Advisory Panel
South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
November 18 & 19, 2021

The Outreach and Communications Advisory Panel (AP) met November 18 & 19, 2021 via webinar to discuss outreach and communications topics relevant to Council programs, projects, and products. Following introductions, the AP received presentations, provided recommendations, and offered updates on current outreach and communication programs, to include:

- 1) Social Media Discussion
- 2) Preliminary Website Review
- 3) Sea Grant Fellowship Update
- 4) Building Relationships with Tackle Shops
- 5) How to Address Red Snapper Issues with Outreach and Communication
- 6) Citizen Science Program Update
- 7) Habitat Program Outreach & Communication Component
- 8) Advisory Panel Member Updates

1) Social Media Discussion

The Council currently uses Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter to share information on a multitude of Council related topics, including meetings, proposed management measures, opportunities for public comment, regulatory changes, and ongoing projects and campaigns. During the AP Meeting, staff provided a presentation on the Council's use of social media and the past informal approach to engaging with comments on those platforms, which has largely been up to staff's discretion.

Leadership has expressed some concerns about this past approach. Since it has been left up to staff to determine when a response to a comment on social media is justified, there are concerns about consistency. In addition, it hasn't always been clear to the public on whether their comments on social media posts are included in the Council's official administrative record. Lastly, engaging with comments on social media can be time consuming and require significant effort from staff.

With these concerns in mind, staff are following recent direction to no longer respond to comments on social media platforms until the Council can have a more formal discussion on how to proceed. In addition, staff must include information on how to provide public comment on every post that includes content with an associated public comment opportunity. Staff also denote that comments on posts associated with a public comment opportunity will not be included in the Council's official administrative record.

The AP reviewed this information and was asked a series of discussion questions. The AP's answers to the following questions will help to inform future Council discussions on social media guidelines and approaches.

- Should the Council develop a social media policy?
- If so, what should be included?
- What are the benefits of the Council being on social media?
- Why should the Council engage in social media?
- What can the Council expect to gain?
- What are the risks of commenting and engaging on social media?
- What are the risks of not participating in social media?
- What is expected of agencies like the Council when it comes to social media presence, including content and managing comments on posts?

AP Feedback:

- Gulf Council staff indicated that the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is adopting guidelines for social media rather than a formal policy with legal ramifications. These guidelines allow for staff discretion on when responding to a comment is justified and outline staff responsibilities and procedures.
- Developing a social media policy or guidelines will be helpful to staff and the public. It would also be helpful to consider objectives so that staff have an idea of what the Council wants to achieve through social media. Objectives will also help staff to evaluate whether the Council's social media presence is doing what the Council wants it to do.
- Even negative comments on social media can drive positive engagement and provide increased opportunities for learning and participation.
- Posting without responding to comments is a waste of the platform.
- Engagement and interactions lead to a broader audience.
- While folks on the outside may only see negative comments, the analytics show that thousands of people were reached with a single post.
- Social media platforms offer the most bang for the buck.
- There are mental health considerations to keep in mind for staff managing social media platforms and guidelines can be helpful, providing a safety net that staff can refer to in difficult situations.
- Polarizing discussions can benefit from guidelines but having discretion is good.
- If you leave a void, others will take the opportunity to fill it, so it is best to take over the narrative so misinformation doesn't spread.
- It might be helpful to include best practices for staff on personal social media platforms as well. Other agencies indicated that they have had issues with that in the past.
- Some people are experiencing social media fatigue, with some industry sponsors now requiring fewer social media posts than they were several years ago. However the information the Council shares is important and has gotten much better of the years.

- Continue to send folks to the appropriate links to provide public comment.
- Consider developing generic responses to typical questions or comments. For example, if someone comments with suggestions on bag limits for a species, reply with a generic response on how to provide public comment.
- While folks might have the expectation that they will get an immediate response on social media, staff should not be expected to be available at all times. Although there is pressure to actively monitor and moderate, guidelines should clearly describe staff responsibilities.
- Since managing social media can take up a lot of staff time, establishing guidelines will also help staff to prioritize time.
- Consider using the Gulf Council’s guidelines and those of other partner agencies as a template.
- Consider including a note that comments on social media are not part of the official administrative record at the top of each social media page or account.
- Social media isn’t as important to commercial sector since they rely on newsletters and bulletins posted at the fish market.
- Social media and hashtags are valuable for spreading awareness and combatting misinformation.
- Look to NOAA Fisheries as an example of extreme caution since their approach to social media is typically one-way communication.
- Risks of not participating on social media outweigh the risks of participating on social media.
- Only a small percentage of constituents are involved in the management process – the challenge will always be to create more engaging content to get others involved.
- The Council is expected to post announcements and reminders about closures and openings.
- It is nice to have the email blasts and social media posts coincide, with consistent messaging across all social media platforms.
- Media and partner agencies can turn to the Council for story ideas and content when appropriate.

2) Preliminary Website Review

Staff provided background information on why the Council chose to redesign safmc.net and then highlighted subsequent website navigation exercises that Council Members, AP Members, and members of the public participated in earlier this year. Stephen Locker with Happy Prime, the web contractor for the redesign project, provided a tour of the general layout and design for the homepage and explained some key features to be included on both the species and fishery management plan webpages.

AP Feedback:

- New design is clean and visually appealing.

- The use of white space should help when folks are scanning the site for information.
- The navigation exercises were great.
- Avoid being too wordy on webpages.
- Consider a scrolling banner image so the homepage can cycle through information on various meetings, projects, and comment opportunities, and represent various sectors.
- Be sure to have a way to highlight big news items on the site.
- “About the Council” might not be the most intuitive location for Council Member and staff directories.
- Menu items seem appropriate.

3) Reef Fish Extension Fellowship

The AP received a presentation on the Reef Fish Extension Fellowship funded through Sea Grant. Staff provided information on the Fellowship structure and job duties, including a focus on outreach and communication efforts for snapper grouper species in the South Atlantic. The fellow will coordinate tackle shop tours, media tours, and symposiums while also serving as a liaison for the South Atlantic Red Snapper Count Project and the South Atlantic Greater Amberjack Count Project.

AP Feedback:

- Mark Phelps volunteered to help the fellow at tackle shop events or in promoting best fishing practices.
- The two-pronged approach to outreach and communications (in-person outreach with fellow and social media presence) is a good way to share information with the public.
- Human connection is key.
- The fellowship could show the value of this kind of work in the South Atlantic, particularly for Sea Grant offices that don’t have the capacity to designate an extension agent specifically for South Atlantic Snapper Grouper.

4) Building Relationships with Tackle Shops

The AP received a presentation on the Council’s plans to build and maintain relationships with tackle shops in the South Atlantic. Studies indicate that tackle shops are regarded as important and reliable sources of information among fishermen. As a result, Council staff would like to work with tackle shops so that they can share Council related news, projects, and activities with their customers. In preparation for this effort, staff reached out to partner agencies to learn more about best practices for communicating with tackle shops. Important takeaways from those discussions were shared with the AP for their consideration. The AP was also posed a series of questions regarding the Council’s plan to interact directly with tackle shops:

- Do you rely on tackle shops for disseminating information? If so, what type of information? Do you rely on tackle shops for information yourself? If so, what information?

- What messaging should be used when communicating with tackle shops?
- Are there other best practices or considerations we should keep in mind for tackle shop visits and regular communication?
- Have you found success in using ambassadors when relaying information to tackle shops? If so, what are some best practices?

AP Feedback:

- Many fishermen work closely with tackle shops and rely on them for information. However, they no longer rely on them as much for regulatory information since so much is available online or in mobile apps.
- Pandemic resulted in many new fishermen, so it's a great time to work with tackle shops to set up seminars and workshops.
- Many people are ready to get out and participate at in-person events, so attendance has been high at fishing workshops in Charleston, SC.
- Big box tackle shops could be a challenge since they already have limited information available in store.
- Educating individuals one-by-one might not be the most effective approach. Consider working with fishing and boating clubs.
- Be cognizant of limited availability of space at tackle shops.
- Print materials often take up too much space on the counter.
- Consider alternative ways to get information to tackle shops as well – social media posts, newsletters, emails, etc.
- Establishing connections with tackle shop staff is important, so identify folks in the area, whether a Council Member or AP Member, to help make the introduction.
- Messaging needs to be consistent across agencies and among agency staff.
- Keep everything honest.
- Ask tackle shops to follow the Council on social media and share information to customers through their own channels.
- Consider developing a banner for use in tackle shops with information on the Council or how to get involved.
- Explain that this is an opportunity for the Council and tackle shops to help each other.
- Make it clear that they are a trusted resource for information.

5) How to Address Red Snapper Issues with Outreach and Communication

The AP received a brief overview of Red Snapper management challenges and how they could impact other Council efforts, such as the best fishing practices campaign and Citizen Science projects. Council Members and staff recognize that the Red Snapper situation has resulted in a loss of credibility and trust. Staff turned to the AP for guidance on how Red Snapper issues, as well as general snapper grouper management challenges, can be more effectively communicated to members of the public. The AP was asked the following discussion questions:

- How do we do a better job of communicating the relationship between the science, what is being seen on the water, and management?
- What messaging should we use to address this?
- Are there other items that we should consider including on the Red Snapper webpage?
- What materials would be useful for fishermen?
- What materials would be useful for partners?
- How should we distribute these materials?

AP Feedback:

- Revamp the video recording of John Carmichael’s presentation at the June Council Meeting and consider developing a video series with clips of differing lengths to suit broader audiences.
- Folks are extremely frustrated and often say that they will harvest red snapper regardless of the regulations.
- Consider hosting a red snapper session or meeting where outreach and communication specialists in the region meet with scientists and managers to discuss questions proposed during the AP. More time will be necessary to discuss these issues and map out a plan for moving forward.
- Use analogies, like John Carmichael’s comparison of height and weight in humans to length and weight in red snapper.
- Consider making people watch the video before giving public comment on red snapper.
- Consider making people watch the video in order to get a snapper grouper permit.
- Add a research section to the red snapper webpage and link to the best fishing practices webpage.
- Utilize influential members of the community to discuss red snapper and best fishing practices, especially in regards to terminal tackle.
- Develop a way to evaluate whether these efforts are effecting change.

6) Citizen Science Program Update

Staff provided a presentation on the Citizen Science Program and its various projects, including updates on FISHstory, the Dolphin Wahoo Participatory Workshops, SciFish App development and scoping meetings, and SAFMC Release. In addition, staff provided information on Phase 1 of the Program Evaluation, a process to determine if the Citizen Science Program is meeting its goals. Through virtual interviews, Rick Bonney is currently gathering baseline data on knowledge, attitudes, collaborations, engagement, and trust levels among various stakeholders.

Several months ago, the SAFMC Release Project expanded to all shallow-water grouper in the South Atlantic. In spring of 2022, the project will also offer fishermen the opportunity to provide information on their released red snapper. In order to recruit and retain users, staff have revitalized outreach and communication efforts for the project.

The AP was posed the following discussion questions to help with these ongoing efforts:

- What communication methods have been most successful for you in reaching fishermen?
- Is there a messaging approach that would appeal to fishermen and increase participation in the project without one-on-one discussions?
- How do you maintain contact with fishermen over time?

AP Feedback:

- Utilize influencers in getting others interested in participating in the project.
- Consider creating a social media contest to recruit and retain participants.
- Host seminars on the project, as well as best fishing practices and other citizen science opportunities.
- Highlight participants on social media, newsletters, and e-blasts.
- Ask participants to push out project information to peers since peer recognition is important.
- Utilize incentives, like a t-shirt, to those that provide information regularly
- Work with fishing clubs, like the West Palm Beach Fishing Club, to get members to participate in the project.
- Show how SAFMC Release is helpful to for-hire captains in addition to what they are already reporting.
- Send personalized catch summary reports to participants.
- Develop a citation program.
- Consider using geo-fencing for notifications to help address the fact the people often forget about the app.
- Go to tournaments in Florida and set up a booth to highlight the project.

7) Habitat Program Outreach and Communication Component

The AP received a presentation on the Council’s Habitat Program Evaluation and Blueprint, which will describe and evaluate the Council’s activities related to habitat mandates in the region. Last year, the Council established a workgroup to develop the scope of the project and the process. That workgroup has since developed the program purpose statement, goals, and objectives, as well as a draft of the blueprint document. The workgroup will next determine the roles of the Habitat AP and the Outreach and Communications AP in the program.

AP Feedback:

- Identify outreach and communication objectives for the Habitat Program.
- Utilize website and story maps to increase awareness of the Council’s role in habitat protection.
- Turn to the Mid-Atlantic Council’s website for a template on Essential Fish Habitat.
- Clearly separate habitat protection work from ecosystem-based management work.
- Develop a short video on what the Council can and cannot do relevant to habitat.
- Make a general connection between healthy habitat and healthy fisheries.

- Use an infographic to illustrate the role of the Council.

8) AP Member Updates

AP Members were asked to share relevant updates with the group. Katie Latanich and those representing North Carolina Sea Grant and Georgia Sea Grant provided [updates in the briefing materials](#). Others provided verbal updates during the meeting.

North Carolina Sea Grant – Scott Baker

Updates were provided in the briefing materials.

Georgia Sea Grant – Bryan Fluech

In addition to the information included in the briefing materials, Bryan Fluech noted that Georgia Sea Grant just received funding for a project with Charlie Phillips on ropeless black sea bass pots.

Katie Latanich

Updates were provided in the briefing materials.

SC Sea Grant - Graham Gaines

- Second Round of Red Snapper Count Requests for Proposals (RFP) is underway
 - \$1.2 M available
- Current project update
 - Data Collection
 - 4000 fin clip samples
 - ROV and camera work underway

BeBe Dalton Harrison

- SC Wildlife Federation
 - The Federation is focusing on sharing information on Citizen Science in outdoor recreation
 - Offered to promote Council’s CitSci program as part of this effort
 - Council staff will help share suggestions for other Citizen Science projects to be included.

Robert Todd

- Noted High School projects in Darien
 - Grant to get youth involved in fisheries
 - Work-based learning program allows students to work while in school
 - Includes working with oyster program
 - Prior opportunities for students to work in shrimp industry
 - Noted a need for updated fisheries videos for the class
 - Working with GA Sea Grant on various projects, including Trawl-2-Trash

- Council staff will contact Robert about sending a guest speaker for the class, as well as any print materials that might be of interest.

Other Business

Scott Baker shared the suggestion to consider game theory approach for addressing management challenges since people can better understand complex issues if they are included in games.

AP Members in Attendance

Scott Baker, Jr., Chair
Shelly Krueger, Vice Chair
Katie Latanich
Mark Phelps
Cinthia Sandoval
Dan Ellinor for Melissa Crouch
Erin Weeks
Emily Muehlstein
Tyler Jones
Lt. James Bruce
Bryan Fluech
Graham Gaines
Robert Todd
BeBe Dalton Harrison
George Patane
Mary Sabo
Tina Berger
Sean Meehan