

FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
OUTREACH AND COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE
SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL
June 11, 2026

The Outreach and Communications Committee (Committee) approved the agenda for the June 2026 meeting and the minutes from the December 2022 meeting. Scott Baker, Chair of the Outreach and Communications Advisory Panel (AP), provided a summary of the AP meeting held May 5-6, 2026. The Committee received a presentation from Council staff and discussed the draft outreach and communications goals, objectives, and strategies with support to continue as modified. The Committee also received an update from Return 'Em Right staff on the program and its planned expansion in the South Atlantic.

Advisory Panel Report

The Outreach and Communications AP met May 5-6, 2026, in North Charleston, South Carolina, to discuss the draft outreach and communications goals and objectives; strategies to engage Marine Resource Education Program (MREP) graduates, Council workshop participants, and the public in the Council process; Lines of Communication; state outreach efforts for the South Atlantic Red Snapper Exempted Fishing Permits; the Sea Grant Reef Fish Fellowship; the Citizen Science Program; and other relevant topics. Scott Baker, AP Chair, presented a summary of the meeting and the AP's recommendations.

The Committee noted the following:

- The Gulf Council's voicemail public comment tool is an innovative, cost-effective, and approachable way for stakeholders to provide public comment. There was interest in this tool to be explored in the future for the South Atlantic.
- There was support for having simple "next steps" materials for MREP Alumni on how to get more involved in the Council and the fishery management process.

Draft Outreach and Communications Goals and Objectives

With Council outreach and communications staff obtaining new roles, a framework has been developed to guide the Council's broader outreach and communications efforts. Staff provided an overview of the four outreach and communications goals and their related objectives and strategies, which were developed with input from the Outreach and Communications AP.

The Committee was supportive of the goals and objectives with the following modifications:

- Add "fishery management process" to Goal #1 to read as follows: "Provide consistent, understandable, and accessible information on the **fishery management process**, Council, regulations, and stakeholder input opportunities."
- Remove the word "track" and strategies C and D from Goal 4, Objective 4.3.

Additional feedback included:

- Explore a cost benefit analysis on the different types of public engagement (e.g., in person vs. virtual). This could possibly be added as a strategy to Goal 4, Objective 4.3.
- Consider an ambassador program similar to the Best Fishing Practices Master Volunteer Program.
- Showcase South Atlantic Council outreach and communication efforts at the 2027 Council Coordination Committee.
- Ensure the goals, objectives, and strategies remain a living document that adapts to changing management, outreach, and communication priorities.
- Recognize Advisory Panel members as valuable stakeholder partners and incorporate them into outreach activities when opportunities arise.

Return ‘Em Right Expansion in the South Atlantic

Nick Haddad, staff from the Return ‘Em Right program, provided an overview of the Gulf originated program and its plans for expansion to the South Atlantic. The program, which was launched in May 2022, has since provided best fishing practices training and gear to over 51,000 Gulf reef fish anglers. In June 2025, the [Open Ocean Trustee Implementation Group Final Restoration Plan 4](#) approved the expansion of the Return ‘Em Right program. As of May 2026, South Atlantic anglers are eligible for gear after completing the educational module. A marketing push was planned for June 2026; however, Return ‘Em Right is considering potential alternative launch dates for this initiative due to the recent injunction of the South Atlantic Red Snapper Exempted Permits. The Committee supported Return ‘Em Right expanding to the South Atlantic and expressed the importance of collaboration with the Council and South Atlantic states.