

SAFMC Citizen Science Projects Advisory Panel
Webinar Meeting Summary
10/6/2025

Welcome and Meeting Overview

- Staff gave a short welcome and introduced the SAFMC CitSci Committee chair (Amy Dukes) and vice-chair (Kerry Marhefka); AP members introduced themselves
- Staff reviewed the webinar goals:
 - *Review and recommend updates to the citizen science (citsci) research priorities*
 - *Overview and discussion on development of CitSci Program indicators*
 - *Update on CitSci Program activities*

Citizen Science Research Priorities

- Staff provided background on the citsci research priorities and process used to update them
- Staff walked through current research priorities with a respective example and feedback provided when citsci research priorities were updated in 2023; Committees discussed and provided feedback on each of the current priorities; key points from the feedback provided for each priority is summarized below

CURRENT RESEARCH PRIORITIES

CitSci Research Priority: *Age Sampling*

- **Support keeping as a research priority**
- Age sampling from the recreational sector remains a critical data gap
- Agreement that otolith collection by fishermen would be challenging and not practical without extensive training; noted otolith removal can be challenging (especially for some species) even with experience and training
- Fin clip data collection or carcass drop off programs would be easier and more feasible methods for citizen scientists to gather biological samples for ageing
- Noted that research methods to age fish from fin clips is promising but still developing
- Sampling design and pilot testing would be critical for a successful project
- Encouraged any project developed under this priority to potentially collaborate and leverage existing efforts by partners (states, feds)
- AP shared examples of existing projects that may be helpful to look towards as examples (e.g., USFWS migratory bird wing project)

CitSci Research Priority: *Discard Information*

- **Support keeping as a research priority; high priority**
- Better information on released fish remains a high priority for many Council managed species
- Recommend adding Spanish Mackerel under target species due to SEDAR 78 highlighting recreational discard data needs

- Recommend adding tournaments to target volunteers; AP members noted tournaments may be a good avenue to explore for project promotion and volunteer recruitment
- CitSci data on released fish is already proving useful in scientific and management contexts (e.g., SEDAR 90 - SAFMC Release and MyFishCount data)
- New technologies may be able to help with data collection and validation (e.g., getting automated fish lengths within apps when items of known measure are in photo)
- Combining 'event style' challenges with opportunities to sample on own over time (with incentives) may help increase participation
- Feedback loop back to participants on data usage is critical; these communications may help increase participation as well
- Explore incorporating key data fields into commercial and for-hire logbooks for ease of participants

CitSci Research Priority: *Genetic Sampling*

- **Support keeping as a research priority; high priority**
- Could consider combining with the 'ageing' priority when research methods to get ages from fin clips are further developed
- Recommend adding King Mackerel under target species due to research need identified during the Mackerel Port Meetings to explore whether the 'mixing zone' has shifted
- AP members noted it may be most helpful to focus on species where there is limited fishery independent sampling and/or where fishermen are catching fish in areas/ways not captured through fishery dependent sampling; focus on filling holes; CitSci staff can work with other staff and partners to work towards prioritizing / narrowing down the target species
- Fin clip sampling well suited for citsci and could provide good 'bang for buck'; sampling and storage is less complex than other biological samples; several successful projects have partnered with fishermen to gather fin clips; genetic sampling evolving and likely able to provide more data over time (e.g., ageing)

CitSci Research Priority: *Fishing Infrastructure Inventory*

- **Recommend removing as a CitSci Research Priority for now**
- AP members agreed this was a critical issue but may be best addressed initially via dedicated social science research
- After foundational work is complete - a citsci approach could potentially provide supplemental info, help fill data gaps, and/or help update info over time
- AP members noted some data collection has been done in the South Atlantic states; there is a need to collect consistent data across the region to help inform social analyses for FMPs; first step in a project on infrastructure would be to review the work that has already been done in the region
- AP also noted that the Council doesn't have a lot of influence on infrastructure; local communities typically have more influence

CitSci Research Priority: *Historic Fishing Photos*

- **Support keeping as a research priority**
- Strong interest shown by fishermen, scientists, and members of public through FISHstory
- FISHstory data proving useful in scientific context (e.g., SEDAR 90 – FISHstory length data)
- Low barrier for participation and high engagement potential
- AI could potentially make analyses easier in future

CitSci Research Priority: *Oral Histories & Historic Fishing Logbooks*

- **Support keeping as a research priority; lower priority**
- Can be a powerful research tool; could be a unique and irreplaceable source of information especially as older fishermen age out of the industry; potential good complement to other projects (e.g., historical photos)
- AP discussed whether citsci would be the right approach for oral histories; requires specific training and methods – so if project is developed, training would need to be a key component so information would be gathered in a systematic way
- Potential issue with recall bias – having ‘rose colored glasses’ for the past; this may be less of an issue when documenting how fisheries operated over time, improvements in technology, etc.
- Noted AI tools could help with transcription and summarization

CitSci Research Priority: *Oceanographic & Environmental Data Collection*

- **Support keeping as a research priority**
- Information increasingly important with environmental changes; could collect data on finer scale and help fill gaps not captured by fixed buoys or broad scale models
- Would be helpful to be able to link environmental information with app based reporting/projects; information could be useful to fishermen – linking fishing outcomes to environmental conditions
- Passive gear mounted data loggers could reduce burden and increase participation
- Some info collected by data logger could be sensitive (e.g., specific location)
- Examples of successful projects in other regions where these type of data have helped inform assessments (e.g., eMOLT)

CitSci Research Priority: *Shifting Species & Rare or Data-Limited Species Observations*

- **Support keeping as a research priority**
- Valuable and relevant research area for citsci; noted there are examples of successful efforts in other regions (e.g., Gulf Stream Orphan ID); many fishermen already taking photos – project would just need to direct them to share via right platforms
- Potential to include both new sightings and integrate historical data; AP members noted value in using historic information/context to better understand shifting patterns; noted AI could help analyze archived historical documents; AP member noted industry organization analyzing historical records for some species in NC
- Photos available on social media could potentially be used for a project like this

CitSci Research Priority: *Observations in Managed Areas*

- **Support keeping as a research priority**
- Projects in this area could be considered a mix of cooperative research and citizen science
- Good example of a project that can leverage local knowledge
- Noted there were projects underway in the South Atlantic focused on Spawning Special Management Zones (SSMZs) and project in the Gulf collaborating with recreational anglers
- AP member noted priority was broad; narrowing down to a specific focus (e.g., SSMZ's) with a discrete time window makes more feasible for citsci approach
- Noted these these types of data could be helpful in informing Council decisions on SSMZs (set to sunset in 2027)

CitSci Research Priority: *Movement and Migration*

- **Support keeping as a research priority; emphasis on supporting already existing programs**
- Many examples of successful tagging programs (federal, state, private) – tagging is popular among fishermen and provides a positive engagement experience
- Keeping on the list provides a way to highlight target species of interest for Council
- Noted the importance of lead time when tagging data needed for specific species; can take awhile to tag and get enough recaptures for analysis

CitSci Research Priority: *Shark and Mammal Depredation*

- **Support keeping as a research priority**
- Strong interest in this issue from fishermen; Sweeney Tookes et al. research found this was topic fishermen would be willing to gather info on; shark depredation idea submitted through CitSci Project Idea Portal
- Could provide helpful insight on growing concern impacting fisheries
- Project should be designed to ensure quality and consistent data are collected; could be helpful to integrate this into existing data collection platforms in consistent way

CitSci Research Priority: *Habitat Characterization*

- **Support keeping as a research priority, lower priority**
- Noted some concerns about the quality and usefulness of photos; noted it would be important to collaborate with researchers / data end users early on to ensure data collected would be useable in management context
- Specific location information would likely need to be collected for data to be able to show habitat changes; likely most feasible to collect in areas more easily accessible
- AP member noted advanced bathymetry data may exist but can be proprietary

CitSci Research Priority: *Spiny Lobster Data*

- **Support keeping as a research priority**
- Recommend adding 'local and regional movement' to the data needed due to updated Council Research & Monitoring Plan

- Support GA north focus area where data are more limited; AP members mentioned potential for migratory shifts – seeing large lobsters north of FL so important to gather information on this portion of the stock
- Could be a good diver project

BRAINSTORM ADDITIONAL CITSCI RESEARCH PRIORITIES & DATA NEEDS

- Committee was asked to brainstorm additional research and data needs that could potentially be addressed through citsci; members reviewed ideas discussed when the research priorities were discussed in 2023 and other ideas that have come up during Council related meetings; members also provided feedback that could be more broadly applied to the CitSci Program
- Using CitSci projects to help supplement recreational catch data is an idea that has come up in different Council related meetings and is included in the Council’s Research & Monitoring Plan
 - AP noted it could be helpful to incorporate information on harvested fish into platforms that are being used to collect data on released fish; this would allow additional data to be collected that could potentially be used to supplement recreational catch information for things like rare event species; could potentially add a new citizen science priority or broaden the ‘discard’ priority to cover recreational catch/harvest
 - AP noted recreational discard estimates have great impact on many South Atlantic stock assessments; need to better figure out how/if voluntary data can be used to supplement recreational monitoring programs to get discard estimates and how to address data validation challenges; there is research being done on how to combine design based monitoring programs with voluntary programs

Next Steps for Updating CitSci Research Priorities

- **Oct 16:** CitSci Operations AP meets & provides feedback
- **Oct 23:** DRAFT Updated CitSci Research Priorities sent out for review
- **Nov 6:** Edits on research priorities due to Julia
- **Nov 14:** DRAFT Updated Cit Sci Research Priorities finalized for SAFMC review

Citizen Science Program Indicators

- Staff gave a brief presentation on efforts to develop key indicators to track the progress and impact of the CitSci Program over time; Program trying to identify a few key indicators for each Program goal; staff quickly walked through their suggestions for key indicators to regularly monitor under each Program goal
- AP generally agreed with the overall approach - thought it would be helpful for the Program to identify and monitor key indicators under each goal
- AP members noted it may be helpful to include an indicator to track funding sources and levels over time; noted this was a challenging topic to address late in the meeting and were interested in providing additional feedback after the webinar via email
- Staff will follow up with additional information and deadline to provide feedback via email

Citizen Science Program Update

- Staff provided a brief update on CitSci Program and project activities over the past several months

Webinar Attendance:

AP Members: Bryan Fluech, David Moss, Thoman Newman, Matt Perkinson, Justin Smith,
Mimi Stafford

Council Members: Amy Dukes, Kerry Marhefka

Other Attendees: Matt Seeley

Council Staff: Julia Byrd, Meg Withers, Chip Collier