



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

# **Equity and Environmental Justice in Underserved Communities: The Council's Role**

Socioeconomic Panel  
April 2024



# NMFS Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy

Finalized in May 2023

Describes the path the agency will take to incorporate equity and environmental justice into the vital services they provide, focusing on serving all communities more equitably and effectively.





# Key Terms

## Environmental Justice:

- The fair treatment and **meaningful involvement** of all people, regardless of race, color, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, disability, or income during development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies, including but not limited to:
  - **Equitable** protection from environmental and health hazards;
  - Equitable access to decision making processes; and
  - Equitable opportunity for underserved communities that have been marginalized.

## Meaningful Involvement:

- Stakeholders have an opportunity to participate in decisions about activities that may affect their environment and/or health;
- The public's contribution informs NOAA Fisheries' decisions;
- Community concerns will be considered in the decision-making process; and
- Decision makers will seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected.

## Equity:

- The consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to **underserved communities** that have been denied such treatment.



# Key Terms

## Underserved Communities:

- As defined by Executive Order 13985, refers to **communities that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life**. These include geographic communities as well as populations sharing a particular characteristic, history or identity. Adapting EO 13985 these groups could include but are not limited to:
  - women and girls;
  - Black, Latino, Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and other persons of color;
  - members of religious minorities;
  - lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons;
  - persons with disabilities;
  - persons who live in rural areas;
  - and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality.

## In Fisheries:

- Specific to the fisheries context, underserved groups within fishing communities may include, for example:
  - subsistence fishery participants and their dependents,
  - fishing vessel crews,
  - and fish processor and distribution workers.
  - territorial fishing communities.
- Underserved communities will vary by region, and by the barriers they face.
- Furthermore, many of these community categories intersect. Hence identification of, and meaningful involvement with underserved communities will be a regionally specific and an on-going process that will require long-term commitment.



## NOAA FISHERIES' EQUITY AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE GOALS

Prioritize identification, equitable treatment, and meaningful involvement of underserved communities.

Provide equitable delivery of services

Prioritize EEJ in our mandated mission and work.

### Objectives

#### Empowering Environment:

Provide the institutional support, including training and resources, needed to implement multiple EEJ approaches at NOAA Fisheries. Internal leadership and management will identify EEJ as priorities and encourage staff to consider EEJ in every aspect of their work.

#### **Incorporate Equity and Environmental Justice in Policy and Plans:**

Ensure that our policies promote equal opportunities for all and do not create unintended inequities or unequal burdens for underserved communities

#### **Equity in Research and Researching Equity:**

Identify underserved communities, address their needs, and assess impacts of management decisions.

#### **Outreach and Engage Equitably:**

Build relationships with underserved communities to better understand their needs and improve information sharing with all stakeholders.

#### **Equitably Distribute Benefits:**

Distribute benefits equitably among stakeholders by increasing the access to opportunities for underserved communities.

#### **Inclusive Governance:**

Provide for the meaningful involvement of underserved communities in the decision-making process.



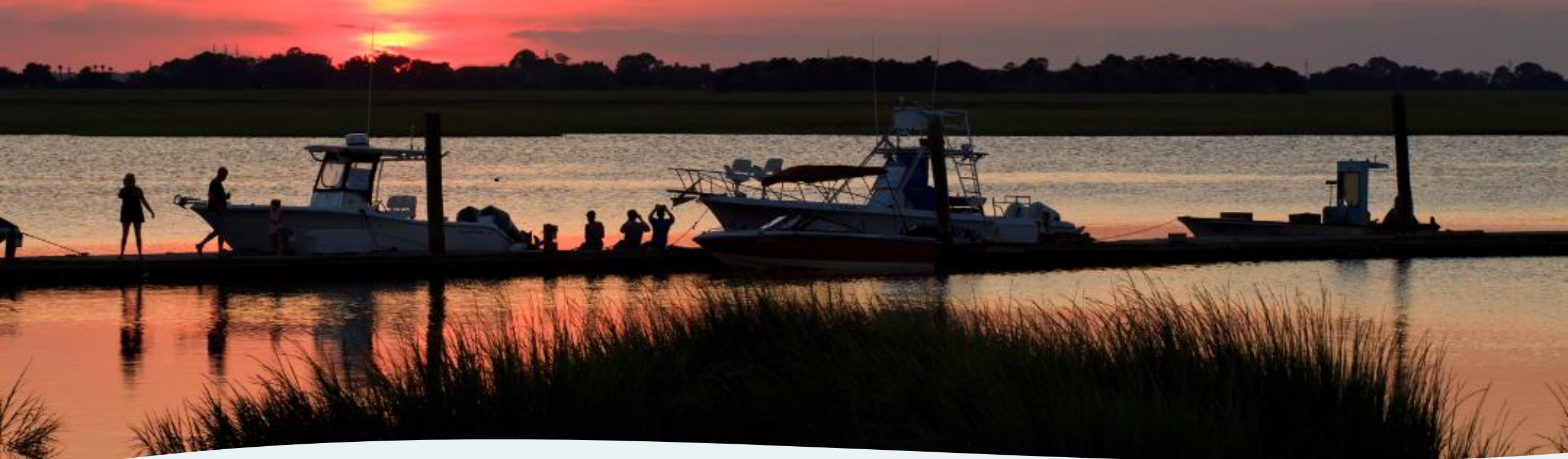
## **Southeast Equity and Environmental Justice Implementation Plan**

- Staff at the NMFS Southeast Regional Office utilized several different engagement strategies to gather information from communities in the southeast region on how NMFS could work to achieve the goals and objectives outlined in the national EEJ Strategy, including:
  - In-person focus groups
  - Scoping sessions
  - Online public request for information
  - Virtual multilingual listening sessions

# Empowering Environment

- *Action Item: Develop and offer NMFS Southeast Region-specific equity and environmental justice training to Council members, advisory panels, Scientific and Statistical Committees, and other advisors as appropriate.*
- Is the SEP aware of any southeast-region specific equity and environmental justice training or other general diversity training that may be beneficial for Council members and staff?





## **Incorporating Equity and Environmental Justice in Policies and Plans**

- *Action Item: Engage Regional Fishery Management Councils in identifying and addressing barriers and structures that lead to the systemic exclusion of underserved communities; encourage the councils to incorporate EEJ principles into operating procedures, codes of conduct, and daily practice by members, staff, and advisory panels.*
- Does the SEP have any recommendations on how Council staff can better incorporate EEJ principles into daily activities?





# Research and Monitoring Equity

- *Action Item: Research the actual socioeconomic impacts of management measures relative to projected impacts to better enable fleet adaptation and to avoid repeated mistakes.*
- Does the SEP know of any studies that have been conducted looking at the success or failure of management measures in the South Atlantic region, specifically?



# Research and Monitoring Equity

- *Action Items: Identify marginalized social groups and historic processes that led to such marginalization, along with potential means for improving relationships between marginalized social groups, NOAA Fisheries, regional management councils, and other entities.*
- Given funding and regulatory constraints (Paperwork Reduction Act), does the SEP have suggestions for how Council staff can better identify marginalized social groups?

# Outreach and Engagement

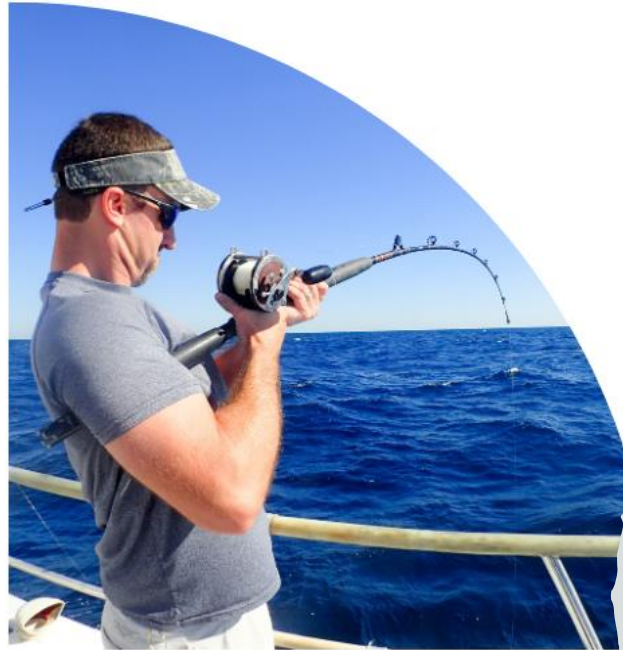
- *Action Item: Develop template language to incorporate into outreach materials, as appropriate, that demonstrates to stakeholders that we are listening, and we care.*
- Incorporating processes that ensure stakeholder input is actively considered and communicated is becoming increasingly important as the Council undertakes more stakeholder driven initiatives, such as Stakeholder Engagement Meetings. How can the Council effectively communicate that they are listening and value stakeholder input?





# Outreach and Engagement

- *Action Item: Consider the human-geographic context in which outreach and engagement is being implemented and develop strategies for reaching constituents who live in rural areas that are distant from Council and other meeting venues.*
- How can the Council improve access to Council meetings for constituents in rural areas?



# Benefits

- *Action Item: Incorporate EEJ considerations into decision making about resource allocations, as data allow and to the extent consistent with applicable law. Considerations could include assessment of impacts and benefits to underserved communities and prioritization of actions that benefit or correct a disparity among communities.*
  - The Council currently incorporates qualitative information provided by advisory panels via Fishery Performance Reports into allocation decisions, but underserved communities are not yet specifically addressed.
- Does the SEP know of information, readily available, that would help the Council better understand how allocation decisions are affecting underserved communities?

# Inclusive Government

- *Action Item: Encourage regional fishery management councils to consider establishing EEJ Advisory Panels to support implementation of the Southeast EEJ Implementation plan.*
- Would the SEP recommend establishing an EEJ Advisory Panel or better incorporating members from underserved communities into existing advisory panels?
- What other issues related to council activities might an EEJ Advisory Panel provide comment on for the Council?





# Inclusive Governance

- *Action Item: Explore ways to create more welcoming/safe agency and Council meeting environments.*
- How might the Council better ensure that Council meetings (including advisory panel meetings) are comfortable for members of communities that are underserved?



**Other Thoughts?**