



The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's **Best Fishing Practices Master Volunteer Program**

Background

Regulatory measures combined with growing fishing efforts in the South Atlantic snapper grouper fishery, particularly from the recreational sector, have led to a drastic increase in the number of non-target snapper and grouper species that must be released. Due to the multispecies nature of the snapper grouper fishery, it is common for non-target species to be caught and released due to regulatory or other reasons, while fishing for other species. The increase in releases has led to an increase in the number of fish that do not survive after being caught and released. This problem is illustrated by red snapper where the number of dead releases far outnumbers fish removed from the population by harvest (SEDAR 73 2021). Large numbers of released fish limit the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (SAFMC) ability to prevent overfishing and reduce the number of fish that can be sustainably landed by the fishery.

Purpose

The SAFMC Best Fishing Practices (BFP) campaign is focused on increasing survivorship within the snapper grouper fishery. Fostering change within the fishery is a long-term goal that requires regular interaction with stakeholders over a significant period to achieve. The Best Fishing Practices Master Volunteer Program (BFP MVP) will train volunteers to become experts in BFP and encourage them to train others in their fishing community. These regional, in-person workshops will increase interaction with stakeholders and expand the BFP campaign.

Focus

BFP MVP will be heavily focused on best fishing practices that can increase survival of released fish, specifically snapper grouper species. This includes the education on federal and state regulated best fishing practices such as descending devices, circle hooks, and dehooking tools, instruction on how to use a descending device and venting tool, and guidance on additional best fishing practices such as best handling practices, avoidance, limiting fight time, and limiting air exposure. Rather than multiple presentations, the workshop will be geared towards discussion and conversation from the participants.

Additional discussions and presentations will be given on the background of the Magnuson Stevens Act, SAFMC, and how to get involved in fisheries management, specifically on how to serve on a SAFMC advisory panel and/or Council, how to make public comment, what the Marine Resource Educational Program (MREP) is and how to apply, and how to get involved in the Citizen Science projects, SAFMC Release and FISHstory.

Target Audiences

The primary target audience will include key members in the fishing community and port samplers (recreationally focused) in the South Atlantic region. One of the most effective information exchanges within the fishing community comes from word of mouth and local tackle shops (*Southeast Florida and South Carolina Anglers' Release Practices and Their Attitudes Toward Descending Devices* 2022). By targeting key members of the fishing community such as, but not limited to, SAFMC Advisory Panel members, Council members, Marine Resource Education Program (MREP) graduates, federal for-hire permit holders, and SAFMC Release participants, the likeliness of positive messaging on behalf of the SAFMC will increase. With key members advocating for SAFMC, there could be an increased involvement in the use of best fishing practices, fisheries management, and citizen science. Along with key members of the community, port samplers are a focal group for the program. They are the front face to anglers returning to the docks and often get questions and complaints about fisheries management. Educating the port samplers can in turn educate the anglers at the dock.

Novice recreational fishermen entering the snapper grouper fishery are also a primary target audience, however this will be more indirectly affected. New entrants into the fishery are often not aware of the multitude of regulations they must follow. While there are many resources that list the regulations, they do not explain how to use a descending device or other non-regulated best fishing practices that can improve survival of released fish. While novice fishermen will be invited to attend the workshops, key members of the fishing community will be the main source of their information.

State and federal agencies will also be targeted due to their vast involvement with the public. Agencies include but are not limited to North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF), South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SCDNR), Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GADNR), Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), U.S. Coastguard, and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Office of Law Enforcement.

Goals and Objectives

GOAL 1: Expand reach by empowering key members of the fishing community to spread the Best Fishing Practices message and methods on SAFMC's behalf.

- OBJECTIVES

- Have key community members complete the BFP MVP program.
- Contact MVPs for future seminars to attend or present at.
- Continue to send educational materials to tackle shop owners, marina owners, and members of fishing clubs that complete BFP MVP to share in their community.
- Encourage involvement with SAFMC such as serving on an advisory panel and/or Council, make public comment, apply to MREP, and become a SAFMC Release and FISHstory participant.

GOAL 2: Increase awareness and use of all best fishing practices when releasing fish, specifically snapper grouper species exhibiting signs of barotrauma.

- **OBJECTIVES**

- Share the regulated and non-regulated best fishing practices.
- Tutorials on how to use each type of descending devices and venting tools.
- Have participants share their own homemade descending device in the workshop.

GOAL 3: Increase SAFMC's regular interaction with stakeholders that will grow involvement in fisheries management.

- **OBJECTIVES**

- Host multiple in person workshops throughout the South Atlantic region (North Carolina through the Florida Keys).
- Encourage involvement with SAFMC such as serving on advisory panel and/or Council, make public comment, and become a SAFMC Release and FISHstory participant.
- Have regular check ins with BFP MVPs.

Workshop Components

Note: This list is based on the fishermen focused workshop and will last approximately 1.5-2 hours long. Port sampler workshop content and length may vary due to time restrictions and need for topics.

1. Best Fishing Practices - presentation, discussion, video, activities

a. General best fishing practices- from rigging to releasing

- Plan ahead: know regulations, know target species, have correct gear on hand
- Landing: limit fight, keep in water if possible and use dehooking tool, limit air exposure if pullout out of water
- Handling: Hold horizontally and support the weight, avoid eyes and gills, use wet hands
- Releasing: using a barotrauma mitigation device if a snapper or grouper is showing signs of barotrauma

b. Barotrauma

- What it is, how it happens, solutions
- Discussion topics:
 - Depths you typically see barotrauma? Time of year? Species?

c. Venting

- What it is vs. what it is not

d. Descending devices

- What is a descending device and different types
- Descending device regulations (federal and state if applicable)
- How does it work? *Instruction and video*
- Activity: Have participants share how they created their own descending device (will reach out before workshop).
- Activity: What are some tips and tricks when using a descending device?
 - Write on post it notes and put on flip charts during break

2. Getting Involved- presentation

a. Citizen Science

- SAFMC's Citizen Science Program background
- SAFMC Release
- FISHstory
- Project Portal Tool

b. The SAFMC

- Magnuson overview
- SAFMC jurisdiction and FMPs
- Advisory panels, Council, MREP, public comment

3. SCDNR/NCDMF/FWC/GADNR Section (if applicable)- presentation

- a. Difference between state and federal management
- b. Upcoming or current projects
- c. Other related topics

Workshop Schedule

Note: Locations and dates are subject to change

Quarter 1 (April-May): South Carolina

- Charleston BOOKED: 4/25, SC DNR Outdoor Classroom
- Myrtle Beach BOOKED: 5/7, Bass Pro
- Port Royal BOOKED: 5/8, Port Royal Maritime Center

Quarter 2 (May-June): Georgia

- Savannah

Quarter 3 (August-September): Florida

- St. Augustine
- Miami
- Keys

Quarter 4 (November-December): North Carolina

- Wilmington
- Morehead City
- Raleigh