

GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

OUTREACH AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Webinar

January 24, 2022

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents.....	2
<u>Adoption of Agenda and Approval of Minutes and Action Guide and Next Steps.....</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Presentation: 2021 Communication Analytics and Updated 2021 Communications Improvement Plan.....</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Draft Social Media Guidelines.....</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Presentation on the Council's Use of Social Media.....</u>	<u>19</u>
<u>Draft Public Comment Guidelines.....</u>	<u>25</u>
<u>Draft Press Release Guidelines.....</u>	<u>29</u>
<u>2022 Communications Improvement Plan.....</u>	<u>29</u>
<u>Remaining Items from the Outreach and Education Technical Committee.....</u>	<u>33</u>
<u>Presentation: Summary of Discard and Barotrauma Reduction Efforts Across the Region.....</u>	<u>38</u>
<u>Adjournment.....</u>	<u>41</u>

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1 The Outreach and Education Committee of the Gulf of Mexico
2 Fishery Management Council convened on Monday morning, January
3 24, 2022, and was called to order by Chairman Greg Stunz.

4
5 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**
6 **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**
7 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**
8

9 **CHAIRMAN GREG STUNZ:** We will call the Outreach and Education
10 Committee to order. Looking down the list, and I guess Bernie
11 or someone can help me, just in case, because I haven't looked
12 in the last few minutes, but, in terms of a roll call, Mr. Gill
13 is here, and I see both Mr. Bannon and Mr. Anson online, Ms.
14 Boggs, Mr. Broussard, Mr. Dyskow, and I did not see Mr. Nadeau
15 or Motoi on there, but we'll still have a quorum, and Mr.
16 Spraggins or Burris, and so, with that, we'll move on to the
17 first item of business, and that is the Adoption of the Agenda.

18
19 I guess, in this virtual format, I will just ask for opposition,
20 before we approve, but, first, is there any comments, edits,
21 or additions to the agenda? Hearing none, we will move to adopt
22 the agenda. Is there any opposition to adopting the agenda as-
23 is? Hearing none, we will consider the agenda approved.

24
25 The next item of business is Approval of the Minutes, and the
26 same thing. Any edits or comments regarding the minutes?
27 Seeing or hearing none, we will consider the minutes approved.
28 Any opposition to approving the minutes as-is?

29
30 **MR. BILLY BROUSSARD:** I have no opposition, but what I'm
31 wondering is do you need a name attached to a motion and a
32 second in order to approve them?

33
34 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** I don't think so, Billy. In this virtual
35 world, since I'm not hearing any opposition, I was just moving
36 forward as though they're approved, but I would defer that maybe
37 to council staff, if we actually need to have a formal motion
38 with a first and a second, and or are we fine just, with no
39 opposition, considering that approved.

40
41 **MR. DALE DIAZ:** Dr. Stunz, I'm talking to the staff, and,
42 without opposition, it's considered by acclamation.

43
44 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Okay. All right. Mr. Broussard, if that's
45 okay with you, then we'll just assume acclamation.

46
47 **MR. BROUSSARD:** That's fine. I just was making sure.
48

1 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** In the interest of time. Certainly, when we
2 get to more motions substantive regarding things, I will ask for
3 official motions and seconds and that sort of thing. Also, I am
4 seeing, in the notes here, that Adam Peterson is standing in for
5 Motoi today, and so we're fine with the roll call.

6
7 The next of business is talking through our Action Guide and
8 Next Steps, and I guess, Ms. Muehlstein, you're going to do that
9 for us, and I'm looking here at -- Gosh, there is about seven
10 items that are pretty substantive, and so maybe, Emily, if you
11 want to just talk through each one as we go, and that might help
12 us stay a little more focused, or, if there are some broad
13 things that you want to talk about at first, that's fine. Go
14 ahead.

15
16 **MS. EMILY MUEHLSTEIN:** I would absolutely prefer to do it that
17 way, and so, if you're ready, we can move on to the next agenda
18 item, and I will address the action guide before I start that.

19
20 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Sure, and so that would be Item Number IV then.

21
22 **PRESENTATION: 2021 COMMUNICATIONS ANALYTICS AND UPDATED 2021**
23 **COMMUNICATIONS IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

24
25 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Okay. Great. Looking at the Action Guide and
26 Next Steps for Item Number IV, which is our 2021 Communication
27 Analytics and our Updated 2021 Communications Improvement Plan,
28 this is really just an item for discussion and potential
29 recommendations.

30
31 I am going to go ahead and present an overview of all of our
32 analytics and a progress report on our 2021 communications plan,
33 which you might remember is our sort of first attempt to do an
34 annual improvement plan, and the committee should just go ahead
35 and make any recommendations or considerations, as appropriate,
36 once I give the presentation. I think, with that, we can move
37 to the presentation, and I have tried to, in the interest of
38 time, kind of combine these two items in one, because I think
39 the communications plan and the improvements that we made
40 certainly had some impact on our analytics, and so I think it's
41 interesting to look at them side-by-side.

42
43 Here we go, and so we'll start with our website. In our
44 communications improvement plan for 2021, we had a list of
45 things that we wanted to do to improve our website. Most of
46 them surrounded the idea of creating these fish science
47 webpages, which host SEDAR stock assessment links, some
48 executive reports, our Something's Fishy reports, and, in a

1 minute, I will explain that we have renamed that tool to
2 Fishermen Feedback, rather than Something's Fishy.

3
4 We also have those individual species hot sheets and any sort of
5 random infographics that we have made and developed over the
6 years, and those are all hosted on those fish science webpages,
7 and then the secondary goal was to create a print widget for our
8 regulations, since we no longer produce those paper regulation
9 booklets, and we have accomplished all of our goals in this
10 period, and so we'll go into the insights on the next slide.

11
12 Looking at our analytics from this year and last year, you can
13 see this shows that we've had a steady increase in sessions for
14 our website over the last two years. If you look at the table
15 below, it gives you a little bit of a longer time period, rather
16 than a quarterly breakdown.

17
18 Annual sessions, starting from 2017 through 2021, you can see
19 there's been a pretty grand improvement, and you know, honestly,
20 it's really hard to figure out if that's attributable to
21 something that we're doing to improve the website, or what I
22 suspect is that the pandemic has sort of driven people to give
23 us a little bit more online traffic than normal as well. Then
24 you can also see our annual page views, and the same trends are
25 continuing there.

26
27 This is a little bit deeper dive into our website, and what you
28 will see, on the left, is the website use by page, and this is
29 just sort of the top-ten most exciting pages on our website, and
30 you will see that they're focused mostly on our fishing
31 regulations and our meeting materials, which are, obviously, the
32 most popular things on our page, and then we had, in 2021,
33 140,566 unique users to our site, and, interestingly, 87 percent
34 of those unique users were new visitors, and 13 percent were
35 returning visitors, and so I think those returning visitors
36 probably consist of our AP members, our SSC members, and some of
37 our very involved fishermen and things that keep going back for
38 meeting resources and things like that, whereas potentially that
39 87 percent of new users is people who are just discovering us
40 for the first time or are looking at a regulation once a year.

41
42 We'll move on to Fish Rules, and so, in our improvement plan, we
43 decided to develop and launch Fish Rules Commercial. Through
44 this, we created a commercial regulations database, based on
45 permit and then species, and so it's set up different than the
46 recreational Fish Rules app. It also shows commercial quota
47 tracking, which is a feature that we've heard is quite useful.

1 We beta tested and launched the app, and we maintain the
2 regulations, and we update the quotas weekly, and so we were
3 able to accomplish all of our goals for Fish Rules in 2021, and,
4 if we go to the next slide, we'll look at the analytics.

5
6 We'll start with the recreational Fish Rules, which you know
7 we've been using since 2019. As you can see, our unique users
8 have increased pretty dramatically in the time period that we've
9 used this app, and some of the interesting things to look at are
10 sessions per user, and it looks like, when somebody downloads
11 the app, they have an average of seven sessions per person,
12 which I think is kind of interesting. People are -- It shows
13 that people go back and use it more than once.

14
15 Then average engagement time per use is one minute and twenty-
16 three seconds, and so I think that's also kind of an interesting
17 thing to think about.

18
19 These two tables show the top species views, starting with red
20 drum, gag grouper, and then greater amberjack, and then the top
21 location views, and so you will see that Fish Rules is actually
22 based -- It's kind of a nationwide service, and so there's a lot
23 in the Southeast, and so the South Atlantic federal waters are
24 the top hit, and then you'll see the Gulf of Mexico federal
25 waters are the second most popular.

26
27 Commercial Fish Rules, which we launched sort of, I guess, in
28 late spring of 2021, and that has 1,800 users. The interesting
29 thing that you see here is there are ninety sessions per user,
30 and so, if you think about the recreational app, there was seven
31 sessions per user, on average, and so ninety sessions per user
32 is showing that the folks that are using this app are using it
33 really frequently, and that's actually pretty surprising to both
34 myself and the app developer.

35
36 Then average engagement time per use is also really interesting,
37 and it's nine minutes, and so, people are on there, they are
38 deep diving. They're going in, and they're looking at all the
39 information. If you've seen the app, it does have all the
40 permit conditions listed, and it's kind of a one-stop shop for
41 everything, and so I think that's something that we can also be
42 pretty proud of.

43
44 Interestingly, you can see, on the bottom-left, users by city,
45 and so Orlando, Florida is sort of our number-one hotspot there,
46 with Charlotte and then Washington being next, and then our top
47 page views, and it will show you the home page is the first one
48 and then the list of permits, and so I think that's pretty

1 interesting, to just check out what people are actually spending
2 time in.

3
4 We will now talk about our email listserv, and so, right now, we
5 use Constant Contact, and that listserv is how we send out our
6 press releases, and people can kind of sign up to be a part of
7 that listserv, and so our goals for 2021 were to add a pop-up
8 bubble on our press release webpage to promote newsletter
9 signup.

10
11 We wanted to improve opportunities to sign-up through social
12 media on our website and during in-person events, and we also
13 aim to maintain our staff and council contact lists a little
14 better and also create press release guidelines. As you can see
15 by the checkmarks, we have accomplished all those goals, and
16 then the next slide will show you the corresponding analytics.

17
18 Up here, at the top of the slide, you will see, from 2018
19 through 2021, it's kind of a slow, but steady increase to
20 subscribers, with a huge bump at the beginning of 2021, and I've
21 got to tell you that I don't have a great rationale for why that
22 huge bump occurred, and it might have been in response to sort
23 of a social media push that we did, or I'm not really sure
24 what's going on there, and it looks, as you can see, like the
25 line isn't increasing as quickly as some of our other analytics,
26 but, you know, this, to me, is the gold standard of getting
27 somebody involved, right, and so signing up for a newsletter is
28 kind of a big commitment, right, and it means we're going into
29 your email box, and you're looking for a lot of relevant
30 information there, and so that sort of slow climb doesn't really
31 surprise me.

32
33 Next, if you look at the table on the bottom, showing analytics
34 from each year, starting in 2017 through now, that increase in
35 subscribers is reflected year over year, and one of the
36 interesting things that we do is we count the number of
37 publications each year, and, this year, we blew all of the
38 previous years out of -- In 2021, we blew all of the previous
39 years out of the water with the number of publications that we
40 sent out.

41
42 Then one thing I just want to put your attention to is this open
43 rate, and so you look at it, and that's people who actually open
44 the email, and it tracks that, and I think, from sort of an
45 external perspective, looking at an open rate of one-third of
46 the emails are being opened, I think it's pretty easy to take
47 for granted that maybe that's not a big deal, but I looked, and
48 our open rate is really high, considering average email

1 marketing open rates.

2
3 In 2021, that average rate was 18 percent, and so you compare
4 that to the 33 percent, and it seems like the people that are
5 part of our listserv are actually pretty engaged in the content
6 that we're sending.

7
8 Moving on to our video improvements, we aimed to produce short
9 video interviews with SSC members, AP members, and council
10 members, and we have a ton of experts in the council process,
11 and we would like to explain some of the more complex scientific
12 and management topics, and this was not completed this year, and
13 so we have not made any improvement to our video production for
14 council communications so far.

15
16 What you will see though is, in our next year's communication
17 plan, we're going to bring that back up, because I think is
18 something that ourselves, as well as the council's technical
19 committee, find to be very important.

20
21 We'll look at the analytics, despite the fact that we haven't
22 done anything different this year, and what you'll see is we
23 still have a pretty steady trend in increase in viewership for
24 our videos. We produced six videos this year, with -- These
25 video views are specific to those six videos, and so we had 864
26 views of those six videos that we produced in the year, and
27 that's still higher than previous years, or at least from last
28 year, or from 2021 we're up, and the, for total views, we had
29 14,000, and so that continues to climb steadily.

30
31 Next we'll go to social media, and so our goals this year were
32 to create reoccurring positive content, to regularly announce
33 season openings and closings and start an Instagram account, and
34 so, really, with our use of Facebook in the last couple of
35 years, it had sort of dropped off a little bit, and we decided
36 that, in this year, it would be a goal for us to reinvigorate
37 our use of the Facebook platform, and what you will see in the
38 analytics, on the next slide, is, as we suspected, you really
39 get out of this platform what you put into it.

40
41 Looking at our Facebook analytics, we'll start with the table at
42 the top, from 2017 through 2021, and we have a steady increase
43 in the number of followers, and the other interesting statistics
44 that we'll look at are engagement and reach, and so we did, as I
45 said, put a lot of directed effort in 2021, compared to 2022,
46 and, if you look at these graphs at the bottom, it's going to
47 show you our quarterly analytics from 2020 and 2021, and you can
48 see that there is a huge increase in both engagements and reach

1 on these pages for 2021, again sort of showing that you get out
2 of this platform what you put into it.

3
4 Just so you guys are sort of -- Just to give you a little bit of
5 a better understanding, an engagement means that somebody has
6 interacted with a post or content that we've put up, and that
7 means that they're shared it with their friends, or they have
8 liked it, or maybe disliked it, or they have commented on it,
9 and reach is the amount of times that our content has showed up
10 on somebody's page, and so the amount of times that our content
11 shows up on your newsfeed, if you are to just open the platform.

12
13 We also started an Instagram account this year, and what you'll
14 see here is, although it is a fledging account, we do have some
15 steady increase in engagements and reach with this platform as
16 well. Meta, which is the parent company of both Facebook and
17 Instagram, has made it very easy for us to cross-post and use
18 the platforms almost as one, but they reach different audiences,
19 and so that's part of the reason that we decided to start using
20 Instagram.

21
22 Okay, and we'll move to the blog. Last year, we decided that we
23 wanted to change the blog a little bit. We wanted to increase
24 the frequency and relevance of the posts that we make, and we
25 wanted to transition away from using a third-party hosting
26 service, and so we were using Blogger, and what we did was move
27 the blog onto our website specifically, and then we also wanted
28 to create a quarterly blog article digest, meaning, through our
29 listserv, we would send out sort of a, hey, in case you missed
30 it, here are some of the blog posts that we've put out.

31
32 What you will see is we have accomplished all of these goals.
33 However, our quarterly article digest was sent out for the first
34 time in December, and so just a heads-up on that, and then let's
35 look at our analytics.

36
37 There's pretty steady use of the blog, as you will see. One of
38 the things that I want to point out is, this year -- If you go
39 to the very bottom of the page, it will show you the number of
40 posts that we made, and so we actually wrote fourteen blog
41 articles this year, rather than our sort of standard seven that
42 you will see from years past.

43
44 What's interesting is it does look like our analytics are down,
45 based on this change, but I kind of dug into what was going on
46 here, and it turns out that, in 2017 through 2020, Blogger, that
47 external hosting service that we used, was tracking our blog
48 page views as views of all of the Gulf Council blog content over

1 time, and what has happened here is, rather than there being
2 sort of a downshift in our actual analytics, it's measuring
3 something different, and so the blog page views previously were
4 all of the views of all of the content that we had ever put out
5 through Blogger, and, in 2021, it switched over to only being
6 the homepage of our blog, like the welcome page of the blog, and
7 so, basically, 846 people came to that welcome page, and then we
8 had 673 actual reads of the articles that we put out.

9
10 I know that's a little bit confusing, but I was a little
11 concerned, when I first saw this analytic, and it took me a
12 minute to figure out what was going on there.

13
14 We also had some additional improvements that we were looking at
15 in 2021, and the first thing was improving our Something's Fishy
16 tool, and sort of maybe the most important thing that we've done
17 is we hosted a renaming contest with the public for the
18 Something's Fishy effort. As you guys might be aware, the name
19 "Something's Fishy" seemed to imply that maybe we were looking
20 for negative responses, or we were looking for negative
21 information, and so it was suggested that we considered renaming
22 the tool.

23
24 We figure that, if we made it sort of a public contest, that it
25 might actually drum up a little bit more awareness of the tool
26 itself, and the council's Outreach and Education Technical
27 Committee looked over all of the entries for the renaming
28 contest and selected the new name Fishermen Feedback.

29
30 What you will see is we'll start to rebrand, in this year, so
31 that that Something's Fishy effort transitions over to being
32 Fishermen Feedback, and we also wanted to host our past efforts
33 for this tool on the council website, which we did accomplish,
34 and we wanted to increase our response rates, by encouraging
35 cross-promotion from members of our Outreach and Education
36 Technical Committee, and then we also aimed to research blanket
37 Paperwork Reduction Act approval and develop Something's Fishy
38 guidelines, but we have not accomplished those yet this year.

39
40 Then, finally, some other additional improvements in 2021 were
41 to sort of improve our public comment process, and so the first
42 thing that we aimed to do, and did accomplish, was to create
43 public comment guidelines, and then the second thing that we
44 aimed to do was optimize our public comment process by creating
45 one central comment database that is searchable and can be
46 linked by topic.

47
48 The way that we gather our public comments online, I think it

1 moves pretty smoothly from the external interface. As a member
2 of the public, or a member of the council, if you're trying to
3 access our comments, and sort of look at issue-specific
4 comments, but what it lacks is a single database that we can
5 sort of use, and maybe even data-mine in the future, or play
6 with, like we do the Something's Fishy comments.

7
8 What we aim to do is sort of add it into one database and really
9 just optimize the system that we use. On the backend, it's not
10 really going to look any different than it does on the frontend,
11 but it will give us a lot more functionality, as staff and the
12 council, to sort of categorize and search over time how
13 sentiment has changed and things like that.

14
15 We are working with a contractor who has created a new structure
16 and process for using Google Forms, and we're now in the process
17 of learning the new system, and we plan to transition to using
18 it between this council meeting and the next council meeting.
19 Mr. Chair, that sort of concludes that presentation.

20
21 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Thank you, Emily. I will open the floor now to
22 the committee for questions regarding this analytical
23 communications segment. If we don't have any questions, Emily,
24 thank you, and that was very informative, and it's good to see
25 that, at least in my mind, it's progressing in a very positive
26 way, and I know that doing all of this and preparing that is a
27 lot of hard work, and so, speaking on behalf of the committee,
28 and the larger council, we really appreciate the work you do in
29 this realm, because, obviously, our communications is a very
30 important component of what we do. Moving on, you're also up
31 next.

32
33 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Mr. Chair, it looks like we do have some hands
34 up, and I don't know if maybe your screen --

35
36 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** I am having a hard time here seeing like --
37 Okay. I am sorry. For some reason, I guess my computer is a
38 little behind. Mr. Anson, go ahead.

39
40 **MR. KEVIN ANSON:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Emily, thank you for
41 the presentation and the information. I am just curious, and I
42 want to confirm, on your slide that you indicated the
43 recreational Fish Rules statistics, and you have there three
44 years listed of 2019, 2020, and 2021, and that represents the
45 entire time series for that particular metric, correct?

46
47 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Yes, and, previous to that, we had our own app
48 that had a decline in usership, year over year, and so 2019 is

1 the first full year that we worked with Fish Rules and have
2 statistics from that effort.

3
4 **MR. ANSON:** I'm just curious, and did you happen to look at how
5 the topics, or the hits, changed from maybe over the three-year
6 time period, and I know it's relatively short, but did the
7 species change during that time period?

8
9 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** You know, I didn't do that comparison, but I
10 could go back, and I could do that, certainly, and I will make
11 note of that, that it would be something that might be of
12 interest for future presentations, but, yes, it's definitely
13 something I could do, because it might be interesting.

14
15 **MR. ANSON:** Thank you.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Okay. Thanks, Kevin. Bob Gill, you're up
18 next.

19
20 **MR. BOG GILL:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to
21 congratulate Emily, and now Carly, for what I consider an
22 outstanding job in the O&E world, and I am struck by when,
23 Emily, when you first came aboard, the O&E program then compared
24 to what you've got running now and the upward growth. It's like
25 day and night, and so congratulations, and I think you're doing
26 a great job.

27
28 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Thank you, Bob.

29
30 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Thank you, Mr. Gill. Ms. Boggs.

31
32 **MS. SUSAN BOGGS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, Emily, really, Bob
33 said everything that I wanted to say. This is a complicated
34 issue for most of us, on a day-to-day basis. I personally use
35 the Fish Rules app quite frequently, and I do guide a lot of the
36 fishermen to it, because I think that's one of the most
37 fantastic things that you and your team have come up with.

38
39 I just really appreciate the information that is provided, and I
40 will have to tell you this. When I read your presentation, I
41 went and researched a lot of things that I really didn't realize
42 were on the Gulf Council website, and so I encourage anyone on
43 the Gulf Council that -- If you have any questions as to where
44 to find these things, please do, because I found a wealth of
45 information just reviewing your presentations for today, and I
46 really appreciate all of your efforts and your team's efforts.
47 Thank you.

1 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Thank you, Susan. Is there any more questions
2 for Emily and her team? Emily, I've got just a quick one for
3 you, while we're moving on to the next agenda item. Early on in
4 your slide, you were talking about the hits that you get from
5 the federal fisheries regulations, and then there is regular
6 fish recommendations, and what's the difference between those
7 two? Sorry, and you might have said that, but I didn't catch
8 it.

9
10 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Sure, and so we do have just a general fishing
11 regulations landing page that will give users the option of
12 either looking at federal fishing regulations or we link to all
13 of the state sites, and so that's more of a landings page,
14 versus targeted views of our federal regulations. I hope that
15 clarifies it.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Okay. Yes, I'm aware of that now, and sorry.
18 I wasn't clear that that's what you meant by that. Okay. Good.
19 Well, I am seeing now that there is no hands up regarding Agenda
20 Item Number IV. If there's nothing else, then we'll move on to
21 Agenda Number V, and, again, Emily, that's you, regarding our
22 social media guidelines.

23 24 **DRAFT SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES**

25
26 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Sure. Thank you so much and so this is kind of
27 a two-parter here, and so, first, what I would like the council
28 to do is look at our draft social media guidelines that we put
29 together this year, and these guidelines are like they're
30 called, and they're guidelines, and they're not necessarily
31 technical SOPPs or anything, but I think it's a really useful
32 tool to have some guidelines, especially as our staff expands or
33 we add new staff, so that folks can sort of understand our angle
34 and sort of how we operate in sort of specific parts of our
35 communications functions.

36
37 We're going to start by looking at our social media guidelines,
38 and then, on top of that, I added a little bit of a presentation
39 on the council use of social media. I know that the South
40 Atlantic has been discussing this a lot lately, and social media
41 is kind of a complicated issue, and so I just thought it would
42 be important to take this opportunity to sort of review how
43 social media works, kind of more generally, and then talk about
44 how we as a council use it, because I know it's one of those
45 platforms that sort of people either love or hate, and so I just
46 thought it would be interesting to have an open discussion with
47 the council committee about our use of social media.

1 The committee -- Basically, I'm just looking for discussion on
2 this and any recommendations on how we can improve either our
3 social media guidelines or our staff process and function, as it
4 relates to social media, and so I guess, with that, we'll start
5 by just sort of doing an overview of these social media
6 guidelines that you have in front of you, and I don't think that
7 I really need to walk you through this very much, and I'm just
8 going to point out some highlights.

9
10 You will see that there is some guidance on how we start
11 accounts, how staff might decide whether or not to start
12 accounts, and one of the things that is interesting here is our
13 O&E Technical Committee suggested that we actually start sort of
14 dummy account, or placeholder accounts, in all of the social
15 media venues that we could find, because they don't want other
16 people to get to them first, and it's kind of a way to reserve
17 our name, just in case we decide that we want to use those
18 platforms, and so that's something that we've done, but starting
19 an account and sort of like that placeholder, is different than
20 actually deciding to actively use an account.

21
22 What you will see here is that we're sort of defining why or how
23 the process that we would go through to determine whether it's
24 appropriate to actually use an account.

25
26 Next, we have some guidance on posting content, and so guidance
27 on what kind of content that we're posting through these
28 different social media outlets, and, next, we have some
29 information on our photo practices and sort of our guidance
30 there. We also have a section called "Think Before You Post",
31 and it's kind of just talking about the consequences of social
32 media and sort of whether or not you make mistakes or the way
33 that, I guess, you represent the Gulf Council when you are
34 posting on social media on one of our accounts.

35
36 Then there is some important guidance on deleting posts, and, as
37 you will see, if you read through the document, it's kind of the
38 worst practice is to delete a post, rather than sort of use it
39 as a teaching opportunity, and so that's spelled out in this
40 document.

41
42 Next, there's a little guidance on monitoring our accounts, and
43 I think one of the most important pieces of these guidelines is
44 a discussion on how we handle negativity. As a regulatory
45 agency, I think we can expect that we have some negativity, and
46 there is a lot of sort of personal responsibility that needs to
47 be taken about whether or not you even respond to negative
48 accounts, and what you will see here is, in our responding to

1 negativity section, we kind of define the types of negative
2 comments that might require some further intervention, and then
3 we talk about the intervention that would be required there.

4
5 There is also a little bit of a section on documenting negative
6 comments and then the process that we would use to either decide
7 to ban a user, and then, if we do decide to ban a user, so that
8 he couldn't interact with our posts, how we would document and
9 go through that process. With that, Greg, I think I will stop
10 there and see if there's any discussion, before we go into the
11 presentation.

12
13 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Thank you, Emily. I will wait a second here,
14 because it seems like my machine is just a little bit behind.
15 Okay. Mr. Gill.

16
17 **MR. GILL:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Emily, for
18 that, and perhaps I missed it, but, relative to all these
19 guidelines, who do you see as the user of these guidelines? Who
20 is the intended audience?

21
22 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** That's a great question, Bob, and so I intend
23 it to be both internally and externally apparent, and so I think
24 it's a great guidance for staff, but I also see this as being
25 publicly available. I don't know how important it is for our
26 social media one specifically, but, when we move on to our
27 public comment guidelines, that one spells out a lot of the
28 guidelines that are relevant for the public as well, and so I
29 would like them to be both internally and externally available.

30
31 **MR. GILL:** Thank you.

32
33 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Okay. Are there other comments or suggestions?
34 Leann.

35
36 **MS. LEANN BOSARGE:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Emily, at some
37 point in the future, are we going to -- First, let me back up.
38 I think us using social media to communicate, I think that's
39 great. That's the way of the world today.

40
41 However, there have been some recent congressional testimonies,
42 and I guess inquiries, you would call it, with some of the
43 larger platforms, and I'm thinking Facebook, and these
44 revelations that it really does -- In some ways, their algorithm
45 could possibly promote negativity, pages that seem to promote
46 negativity, and I think that's certainly something we don't
47 want.

1 I mean, there, obviously, can be animosity between different
2 stakeholder groups on things that the council works on, and so,
3 at some point in the future, are we going to kind of monitor how
4 that evolves and the information that we're learning about those
5 algorithms, and, at some point, have a discussion on which
6 social media platforms we want to continue to be a part of or
7 not?

8
9 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** That's a great point, Leann, and I think,
10 insofar as the way that that algorithm is used, we as a staff
11 have used it to take advantage of the platform, and sort of
12 trying to make sure that our analytics increase, based on the
13 way that the algorithm is used.

14
15 I haven't -- To be honest with you, I haven't really looked at
16 the algorithm to figure out how to manage the negativity, and
17 that hasn't really crossed my mind, and I think it's a great
18 idea, and so I think, maybe in my annual review, because that
19 algorithm does change, but, in my review of the algorithm, and
20 sort of how we can change the way and timing and manner in which
21 we post, to take advantage of it, I think what we can also do is
22 focus on if there's ways that we can figure out how to avoid
23 sort of that negative feedback loop that you mentioned.

24
25 We, at this point, do not have any sort of process set up to
26 formally review the platforms that we're using, but that's
27 certainly something that we can consider, if you think that we
28 should do that on some regular time interval.

29
30 **MS. BOSARGE:** Yes, and I think it would probably be something,
31 you know, just worth looking at, as we learn about these, and we
32 want to do our due diligence, you know, and make sure that what
33 we're doing is very educational and outreach-focused, and
34 hopefully positive, generally speaking, right, and so I think
35 that would be great.

36
37 I'm not sure, and I would love for you to look into the
38 algorithm, but what I was seeing, on the news, and I'm an
39 outsider to this, but it seemed like it was an internal
40 algorithm as well that Facebook specifically had that was doing
41 this, and so I'm not sure it's something that you could control,
42 and so thanks, Emily, and I would love to look into a little
43 more and just make sure we stay on top of it, but no heated rush
44 though.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Ms. Boggs.

47
48 **MS. BOGGS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Emily, I would like to ask a

1 question, and I understand the Public Information Officer, and
2 that would be you, and the Outreach Specialist would be Carly,
3 but who can actually or would be allowed to make the actual
4 post? Would this be something that the council staff -- If
5 someone, and I going to pick on Ava, and she says, hey, we need
6 to do a post about this, and would she write it and bring it to
7 you, or, I mean, what is the approval process, so that we know
8 that we're not getting ourselves in a jam on something that gets
9 posted?

10
11 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** That's a great question, and it is sort of
12 outlined in this document, and I'm happy to sort of make it more
13 clear, but, typically, there are three of us in the office right
14 now that have the credentials that we need to make posts, and
15 that's myself, Carly, and then Camilla, who is the sort of
16 communications admin assistant.

17
18 Typically, what you'll see, when you read through, is that
19 certain types of posts, the ones that don't seem controversial,
20 or are not very technical, and let's just say it's something
21 like a meeting notice, and those posts can go up without any
22 sort of double-checking.

23
24 When we anticipate an issue to be controversial, we certainly
25 run those by the appropriate technical staff member beforehand,
26 and then I think everybody in the office, and the staff, is
27 aware that, if they want something promoted that we haven't
28 already decided to put on our schedule, that they can bring that
29 to me, and we'll be happy to consider that.

30
31 Generally, the three of us are the ones that are kind of in
32 charge of cross-checking each other, but we do bring it to
33 technical staff, and then leadership staff, if it's something
34 that is super intense, but, as you will see, typically, the
35 social media channels are a secondary form of communication,
36 rather than a primary form, and so something like a blog post
37 has already been approved by leadership before it's been put up
38 there.

39
40 However, I will say that, during those conversations that ensue
41 after an initial post is made, I myself take the major lion's
42 share of responding to all of the social media posts, or
43 responses, that we get, and can kind of liken that to being on
44 like a phone call.

45
46 You know, if somebody is going to call me on the phone and ask
47 me a question, and, in my position, it's my responsibility to
48 answer that person to the best of my ability, and I don't always

1 have the opportunity, on that phone call, to call Carrie or John
2 and make sure that that's the appropriate response, and so it's
3 kind of the same on social media. It's that sort of the buck
4 stops with the Public Information Officer, I guess, and that's
5 why I'm the one that engages in the majority of the sort of
6 conversation that ensues after initial posting.

7
8 **MS. BOGGS:** Right, and I appreciate that you, and you're right
9 that you did outline that very well in this document, about the
10 nature of the matter and kind of steps to get there, and my main
11 question, and I didn't ask it properly, and you answered it, was
12 who has the credentials, and, in other words, not just anybody
13 can get on there and put out a post, and we do have some stops,
14 where we're monitoring it, and it's just not open for everyone,
15 and so thank you for your time and your answer.

16
17 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Thank you, Susan. Any others, before we move
18 on to the presentation? I don't see any more hands, and I will
19 give it a minute or two more. Emily, one comment that I had,
20 and as you well know, and I don't know if other members of the
21 committee or council -- During the other discussions of the
22 workgroups and other education and outreach folks, the
23 discussion was we sort of had two options.

24
25 You know, we're putting information out there, and the comments
26 are turned on, and the other option, of course, is to turn the
27 comments off, and so you kind of weigh these options of are we
28 getting any useful comments, and how much of that time is it
29 taking you and others to respond to those, but, as Leann and
30 some others have pointed out in the past, those tend to
31 compound, and they can often turn pretty negative real quickly,
32 and I don't think that looks good on anyone, and so something to
33 consider, and hopefully you'll address this in your talk, or
34 later in the committee meeting, but do we want -- You know, do
35 we want that, as a committee?

36
37 Do we just want the information to go out there and there's not
38 an ability to comment? I don't know, but, you know, sometimes I
39 personally feel like it gets out of control just a little bit,
40 even if you follow the guidelines here, and you get a string of
41 whatever, hundreds of comments, that are largely negative that
42 we would have avoided just by, you know, here's the information,
43 or here's the meeting, or here's the new rule or regulation, and
44 you sort of just move on. I don't know, and it's definitely
45 something worth considering.

46
47 With that, Emily, and so I don't know if you'll address that now
48 or later, but, if you want to move into your presentation,

1 that's fine too, and it's up to you.

2
3 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** I think maybe the best way to answer that
4 question is with this presentation that I'm going to give,
5 because I have what I believe is a pretty clear answer to it,
6 but I would like to sort of back it up with the research that I
7 did through this presentation, if we can move on to that.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Okay. Whenever you're ready, and that's Tab O,
10 Number 5.

11
12 **PRESENTATION ON THE COUNCIL'S USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA**
13

14 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** This presentation, as I have kind of alluded
15 to, is going to be a little bit of a deeper dive, not only into
16 sort of our use and our rationale for using and how we use
17 social media, but it's going to go into a little bit of how the
18 algorithm works right now and how and why that impacts us, and
19 so let's go ahead and jump on in.

20
21 Thinking about why specifically we use social media, I think our
22 rationale, and our reasoning, for using social media is pretty
23 similar to why any sort of company, or organization, would do
24 so. First, it's for growth, right, and so it expands our
25 audience, and it does connect us to a target audience, and it
26 does increase awareness about our organization.

27
28 I think one of the things that we all understand is the council
29 exists really to help engage and sort of build a bridge between
30 the fishing community and the science and the sort of management
31 of our nation's fisheries, right, and it's really neat that we
32 have this local-level body that gets to sort of do that, through
33 the council members themselves, but also through the public
34 comment and through all of the advisory panels and sort of
35 fishermen that sort of surround us in our community.

36
37 The next thing that social media does is drive traffic, and so
38 this is really interesting, because it drives traffic to things
39 that we put up, and it can drive traffic to our web resources,
40 and I know, to Susan's point earlier, we have so much
41 information on our website, but, if you don't know to look for
42 it, or you don't know that it's there, or you don't know it's
43 useful, it just sort of sits there, and so one of the things
44 that we can do for Facebook is say, oh, have you seen this
45 discard dashboard that we have that will show you the magnitude
46 of discards.

47
48 It's something that we can use to sort of promote some of those

1 materials that we're already producing and housing on our own
2 website, and we can also drive traffic to our public comment
3 opportunities.

4
5 You know, it's one of those places where we primarily go and
6 say, hey, the council is making this consideration, and how
7 about you give us some comment on it, and then what you will see
8 is that we do have to remind them that Facebook itself is not an
9 official public comment forum, and so we do have to send them to
10 our official public comment record, but that's a really
11 important thing that we can do through our social media.

12
13 It also gives an opportunity for us to have some educational
14 opportunities out there, and we do have a Fish Fact Friday,
15 which is a reoccurring post, and it's really just sort of a fun,
16 positive educational thing that we do on a weekly basis, and we
17 can also drive traffic to external resources, things like the
18 NOAA quota monitoring page that I know a lot of our users are
19 really interested in, and that's something that we can say, hey,
20 guys, did you know that this existed?

21
22 Next is customer support and outreach, and so this really does
23 provide us with a direct platform for discussion, and what's
24 interesting is, sort of in our offices, we definitely get phone
25 calls, and we get emails, and they're often the same question
26 being asked over and over again by a different person, and one
27 of the things that's really cool about social media is somebody
28 can ask a question, and the answer will be put up there, and
29 then, rather than having to answer the question over and over
30 and over again, it's actually there, and it's living history.

31
32 Also, it does build a rapport with anglers, and I know that it
33 does become quite negative, but what we're basically doing is
34 we're going to where these guys are in their spare time, and we
35 are putting ourselves out there and trying to really engage with
36 them where they're engaging anyways.

37
38 Next is reputation management, and so it really does build
39 relationships. We do have a lot of sort of chat -- We have that
40 back chat function that happens, that you don't necessarily see
41 on the page, or somebody might comment, and we're able to
42 respond and say, hey, here, this is a resource that can help you
43 with that, and so it allows us to sort of build relationships
44 with our fishermen.

45
46 It also allows us the opportunity to present factual realities,
47 and what I mean by this is I think there's a lot of groups out
48 there -- If you sort of look at a page like Tampa Offshore

1 Fishing, there are groups that already are talking about the
2 Gulf Council and what the Gulf Council is doing, and it's really
3 helpful for us to be on the same platform and be able to respond
4 to those discussions, because sometimes those discussions aren't
5 based on reality at all, and so it's nice to be able to kind of
6 go in there and be like, oh, no, you guys -- I understand where
7 you're coming from; however, this is what is actually happening.

8
9 Then, finally, it's a great tool for public relations. It's a
10 platform for us to disseminate information, and it builds an
11 audience of interested parties, and we'll talk about that in the
12 analytics, and that's one of the really cool things that happens
13 through social media, and then sort of alluding to what we just
14 talked about with public relations, and, if we're not the ones
15 to be getting the word out on this platform, somebody else will,
16 and that word might not necessarily be that factual reality.

17
18 We do have two active social media platforms, and they're both
19 with Meta, the parent company, and so, in Facebook, in 2021, as
20 you will see, we had 12,000 followers. One of the tongue-in-
21 cheek things that I like to say is that you don't have to like
22 us to like us, and that's sort of a way to say that there's a
23 lot of people out there that aren't necessarily our followers,
24 but are actually engaging in our content anyway, and so you will
25 see that we had 89,000 engagements.

26
27 That is 89,000 times that people liked or commented or shared or
28 clicked on our content, and we reached over a million people
29 this year, and then, through Instagram, since we just started
30 this platform, we have 123 followers, with 3,000 engagements and
31 then 300 extra reach, and so that's just sort of an interesting
32 view.

33
34 If you think about our council listserv, I think I showed you
35 that we have about 5,000 subscribers to the listserv, and so, if
36 you think about the fact that, on Facebook, we're reaching a
37 million people, versus 5,000 when we publish a press release,
38 that's pretty significant.

39
40 Let's go into this algorithm a little bit, and so, generally, I
41 think a lot of you, especially those of you that are sort of
42 analytically driven and maybe don't use social media, you will
43 recognize that an algorithm is a set of steps that are followed
44 to solve a mathematical problem or complete some sort of
45 computer process.

46
47 In social media, it's a little bit different. An algorithm
48 decides which content a user will see and then the order, and it

1 sort of ranks the priority order in which that content will be
2 presented to a user. According to Facebook itself, the goal of
3 the social media algorithm is to share content that will be,
4 quote, most valuable and meaningful to an individual over the
5 long-term.

6
7 The algorithm here really does control what you're seeing, and I
8 think this algorithm is what drives sort of the negativity and
9 positivity feedback loops that you will see in social media.

10
11 How does that algorithm work? It's the same for Facebook and
12 for Instagram, because it's both with that parent company, and
13 there are four factors that drive whether or not your posts will
14 be seen on somebody's newsfeed.

15
16 The first factor is inventory, and so that's going to be the
17 amount of content available to each user at any time, and that's
18 kind of an obvious one, right, and like, if there are 500
19 different things that that person can see, then you're going to
20 be less likely to be seen, but, if that person only has fifteen
21 things available, you're going to be up at the top, and that's
22 something that we cannot control, is the inventory available to
23 folks.

24
25 The next is likelihood of engagement, and this is a really
26 important one for us, and so the likelihood engagement promotes
27 posts that users are more likely to engage with, and it demotes
28 content that users don't want to see, and so, just to go into it
29 a little deeper, there are two types of engagement. There is
30 active engagement, which is those likes and comments and shares,
31 and then there is passive engagement, which is how long you're
32 actually looking at a post that's on your newsfeed, and so it
33 tracks both like your active use of something and your passive
34 use of something.

35
36 What's important here is that, if you have spent time looking at
37 our posts in the past, if you have reacted to one of our posts,
38 or commented on one of our posts, or shared one of our posts,
39 what this means is that the algorithm is going to promote our
40 content on your newsfeed in the future, and so it's sort of this
41 feedback loop of like, the more you interact with us, the more
42 of our content you're going to see.

43
44 The next thing, which I think is really interesting, and
45 something that happens to be really important for us as a
46 council, is this neural network, and so it relies on a user's
47 past behavior and behavior of the user's connections to
48 determine relevancy, and so, much like that likelihood of

1 engagement, and like, if you engage with us on our social media,
2 you're going to see our content more, the next one is, if your
3 friends engage with us on social media and so, if people that
4 you are connected with on social media are interacting with us,
5 you are then going to be more likely to see our content as well.

6
7 Then the fourth one is something that we can kind of control,
8 but it's a little bit less important, and it's the media type,
9 and so the algorithm likes to give you a variety of photos,
10 videos, and links of everything, and so we try and sort of give
11 all that content on our page, but those two in the middle are
12 the ones that I want to focus on here, especially as it relates
13 to Greg's question, which is, if we were to turn off the
14 comments, and we were just to simply post and make it so that
15 you can't interact with our posts, you are automatically going
16 to then be reducing the amount of reach that you have.

17
18 You're going to reduce the amount of people that see your posts,
19 because your friends aren't interacting with it, and so the
20 algorithm isn't putting it on your page, and you're also going
21 to reduce the likelihood that you are going to see that
22 information come up over and over again, because, if we're not
23 allowing for interaction, then this algorithm, these two little
24 ones, are sort of cut out, right, and it's going to suddenly
25 make our content a lot less relevant on people's newsfeeds.

26
27 I just wanted to show you three examples of things that, from
28 the outside, you probably, as a user, aren't seeing, but then,
29 if you look on the right-hand side of the page, you're going to
30 see what I see in the background, and I think these are kind of
31 interesting examples.

32
33 This is an example of what we would all consider to be a
34 negative news, right, and it's the announcement of shutting down
35 the lane snapper fishery, and so this is one of those ones that
36 we posted and we braced for impact, right, and we knew that it
37 was going to be a negative post.

38
39 If you look on the left-hand side of the screen, it shows you
40 the post, and then it also shows you sort of the on-the-surface
41 analytics that one might see. What you're seeing is that we
42 have 114 people that gave us a reaction, right, a grumpy face, a
43 thumbs-up, or a laughing face, and then you'll also see that
44 there are 290 comments on this post alone, with 300 shares, and
45 that shares information is really good.

46
47 What you don't see is on the right side, and these are the
48 insights of the post all together, and a lot of those shares is

1 when people decide that they're going to put that on their
2 newsfeed, and that's what makes something kind of go viral, and
3 so what you will see is, even on our post, we only have 114
4 reactions, but, overall, through all the shares and everything,
5 there is 939 reactions on everybody's share of this post.

6
7 You'll see that there is 1,400 comments, in total, on this post,
8 through everybody's pages, and what you will also see, which I
9 think is really important, is 14,000 people clicked on the link
10 and read the news bulletin, or I'm sorry. It's 1,400, and so
11 that's really important, that we have now driven 1,400 extra
12 people to the actual source of information itself.

13
14 I thought it was interesting to share sort of the backend of
15 what you don't see, I think, and, overall, there were 100,000
16 people that saw this post, and we had 290 negative comments.
17 Like, when I sort of weigh the cost-benefit of that, yes,
18 there's a lot of negativity, but there's also a lot of
19 opportunity for then people to be exposed to that content.

20
21 Here is positive news, and it's a little bit of a different tone
22 here, and so this is the federal for-hire season reopening for
23 red snapper, and what you will see is we had 191 reactions, 234
24 comments, and 1,000 shares, to this post alone. If you go over
25 to the sort of backend here, what you will see is we had almost
26 250,000 people that saw this post, as a result of those thousand
27 shares and all of those engagements.

28
29 There was almost 4,000 reactions, and there were almost 2,000
30 comments, and there were 3,000 people that clicked the link and
31 read the information, and so, again, I just think it's
32 interesting to sort of look at what's actually going on with the
33 post in general, once it sort of leaves our posting.

34
35 Then our final slide will show you educational, or
36 informational, posts, and so this is us posting a blog article
37 that we wrote talking about bait and whether or not the bait
38 that people were using were legal, and you'll see we had fifty
39 reactions, and not too many, and ninety comments, and fourteen
40 shares, but you will see that -- One of the things that I really
41 think is important here is link clicks, and, based on this one
42 posting from Facebook, 719 people read that article.

43
44 That's all I had for this presentation, and I just sort of
45 wanted to clarify a little bit about how social media algorithms
46 work and sort of what that looks like in the real world, and so
47 I'm happy to answer any questions or take any suggestions on how
48 we can improve, or change, the way that we're doing things right

1 now.

2
3 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Thanks, Emily. Let's pause there for a minute,
4 to see if there's any questions regarding this last
5 presentation. I am not seeing any, but, while we're waiting,
6 Emily, the thing about -- I understand that, behind the scenes,
7 things compound, but if you had the comments -- My earlier
8 comment was regarding the negative comments and trying to avoid
9 some of the negativity, and we have enough negativity as-is,
10 obviously, in my opinion, but can't you still share the post,
11 even if the comments were turned off, like in this instance,
12 with this bait post?

13
14 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** You know, the truth is that I don't know enough
15 about whether or not you could, and, whether or not you could
16 share the post, you're still removing two other opportunities to
17 interact with the post, and so I think -- I can speculate that,
18 in either instance, if you at all limit the way that people are
19 able to interact with your post, or the way that we are able to
20 respond, you're going to negatively impact the reach that that
21 post would have, but it's definitely something that I would have
22 to look into a little bit deeper, but I do fear that turning off
23 the comments is going to drive down the reach that we have
24 pretty significantly.

25
26 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Okay, and so I'm not seeing any more hands. If
27 there's no questions, then we'll move on to the next item of
28 business, and so that's going to be Number VI, which is the
29 Public Comment Guidelines.

30 31 **PUBLIC COMMENT GUIDELINES**

32
33 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Okay, and I'm sorry, and I'm sure that you guys
34 are sick of hearing from me by now, but I'm rolling through it.
35 Okay, and so, going to the Action Guide for this, again, these
36 are just draft public guidelines that I want you all to look at,
37 and, hopefully, if you have any feedback, or recommendations, on
38 how we can either improve the documents or our staff process and
39 function in this area, then now would be the time.

40
41 Our next guidelines are our public comment guidelines. To some
42 of the earlier questions, I see these being both internal and
43 external documents that people can reference, and this one
44 especially is one that I think spells out our public comment
45 process, and it talks about deadlines and things, and so it
46 would be a very helpful document for the public to have.

47
48 I will just walk you very quickly through this. Some of the

1 important things, as we go through, is we define our collection
2 of written public comments, and one of the things that I want to
3 point out, in this section, is that, while we do ask commenters
4 to submit some of their personal information, like name and
5 email address and their location or association with the
6 fishery, that there is a mechanism for submitting anonymous
7 comments.

8
9 That is something that we've talked about a little bit in the
10 past, that you can actually submit written public comment
11 anonymously by choosing not to fill out those data fields in the
12 online comment form or simply by requesting that your comments
13 that are sent via email do remain anonymous, and so I just
14 wanted to sort of point out that that is a piece of this that's
15 in here that I think is important to highlight.

16
17 Next, we move on to talk about sort of our general comments and
18 our council-specific comments, or our council-action-specific
19 comments, and these sections not only outline the process, but
20 it would also outline some of the deadlines for submitting
21 comment, in order to make sure that they're summarized and
22 presented to the council.

23
24 Moving on to the solicitation of comments, we talk about how we,
25 as a staff, promote the opportunities to give public comment,
26 and then, sort of finally, one of the important pieces of these
27 guidelines is the section on relaying comments to the council,
28 and I just wanted to point out to you sort of one of the
29 important things, I think, that's in this document, and that is
30 we do spell out that staff does not distribute public comment
31 directly to council members through email.

32
33 I think some of you guys who are sort of legacy council members
34 have seen this go back and forth over time, where we'll get an
35 email during council, and that commenter will say, can you
36 forward this to the council, and we do have it now written, sort
37 of in policy, and it's kind of been an informal policy, but now
38 it's written in this, and it says that, no, we do not forward,
39 because we don't want to sort of bombard you guys with those
40 emails, but what we do is upload them to the appropriate
41 comments forms in real time, and so they are available as soon
42 as possible.

43
44 Then the next thing that I know has been an issue of
45 conversation, over time, is that we write in here that we don't
46 quantify the number of comments received in support or against
47 an action, and I think this is sort of based on the fact that
48 the council commenting process is not a direct democracy, right,

1 and it's not necessarily a vote of public commenters, and so, in
2 the past, and as it's written here, we have avoided quantifying
3 positive and negative comments, with the idea that it's not a
4 vote, and it really is an opportunity to share information with
5 the council and sort of back up points as to why your position
6 is one that should be considered. With that, I will just let
7 the committee give us any suggestions or thoughts.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** I am not seeing any hands, and I'm just waiting
10 a minute or two here, to account for any delays. Mr.
11 Strelcheck, go ahead.

12
13 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Thanks, Greg, and I'm not on the
14 committee, but I just wanted to commend Emily, and, obviously,
15 this, to me, is fantastic, in terms of the guidelines you're
16 putting together.

17
18 One of the challenges that we're wrestling with at NOAA
19 Fisheries is how to combat misinformation, and, obviously,
20 you're working on a variety of platforms to communicate out, and
21 you've shown us, obviously, today, kind of the analytics, in
22 terms of the reach, in both positivity and negativity, in terms
23 of comments, and do you have any kind of sense, feeling, in
24 terms of the communication platforms that are kind of greatest
25 utility to the council and council staff, going forward, and s
26 you see continuing to use all of these platforms, versus kind of
27 honing-in on kind of the ones that have the broadest and most
28 effective reach?

29
30 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Well, that's a big question. I think, clearly,
31 the website is sort of the obvious front-runner, right, and I
32 think that's the most important platform, but the truth is, at
33 least from my personal sense, and I guess I haven't sort of run
34 this by leadership or anything, is that everything that we're
35 currently doing is things that we continue -- That we plan to
36 continue doing, because they all have their own utility in our
37 sort of strategy, right, and so I think each one of them serves
38 a different purpose, and like we talked about the listserv is
39 really for somebody who is very deeply involved in the council
40 process and maybe not necessarily your sort of casual council
41 user.

42
43 Social media hits on different levels as well, and so,
44 generally, I think we plan to continue with this current
45 strategy, and even look into adding more, but I don't know if
46 that answers your question directly.

47
48 **MR. STRELCHECK:** Yes, and thanks for that response, Emily. I

1 think the key point that you just made is that the different
2 platforms and communications strategies you were using are
3 reaching different audiences, and certainly it's a lot of work
4 and effort on your part, and others in the council, to maintain
5 all of that, and so that's why I was really asking the question
6 of, I guess, going forward, something to think about, in terms
7 of if you feel like, you know, something is less useful to the
8 council and whether or not it's worth kind of continuing to
9 pursue that as a platform or not, even if it's maybe reaching a
10 smaller audience that isn't following other platforms, and so
11 thanks.

12
13 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** I think, Andy, to just sort of reiterate that
14 point, I think it's sort of one of those things that naturally
15 takes care of itself. Last year, or I guess in 2020, we decided
16 to stop creating our newsletter, and it was because we saw a
17 trend, year after year, of the analytics for the newsletter just
18 going down and not being as effective, and then another example
19 of that is when we had our own fish app, we had our own fish
20 regulations app, and the analytics of that started trending
21 downward, and that's what sort of -- That's what nudged us to
22 consider using a different platform, and thank goodness, and the
23 Fish Rules app was sort of gaining popularity while we were
24 losing it.

25
26 I think, generally, in reviewing the analytics, through this
27 committee, and through the Outreach and Education Technical
28 Committee, those platforms that become less useful sort of come
29 to light, and then it's up to sort of community of communicators
30 to sort of help decide whether or not we stop using that
31 platform or if maybe we're using it ineffectively and we need to
32 tweak the way that we do that, and so that's kind of how that
33 has taken care of itself in the past, and, so far, it seems like
34 it's working, because all of the analytics that we have to
35 present are usually pretty steadily on the upward climb, and,
36 when they're not, that's when a red flag is -- It's like, is
37 this worth our effort, because you're right that it is a lot of
38 work.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Emily, we probably need to move on and deal
41 with these other items in the agenda, but, before we do that,
42 because I don't have a great feel of exactly how long this will
43 take, and, Mr. Chairman, you can chime-in too, and we have about
44 twenty minutes left, and there is four, at least four, items
45 that will probably merit some discussion, and one, of course,
46 includes a presentation, and so, Emily, I don't know -- Are
47 Items VII and VIII pretty quick, or do we need to move on in the
48 agenda to the presentations, or what do you recommend as more of

1 a priority here for the committee?

2
3 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** I think we can do it all very quickly.

4
5 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Okay, and so twenty minutes then. Go for it.

6
7 **DRAFT PRESS RELEASE GUIDELINES**

8
9 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** All right, and so, next, we'll move on to our
10 Press Release Guidelines. The technical committee had no
11 comments on these, and this is really more -- Well, I see it
12 being both internal and external-facing, and I think it's really
13 more of a guide for staff on how and when press releases are
14 triggered, and so we just outlined the different types of press
15 releases and triggers that we use in order to determine whether
16 we're going to put a press release out for an issue.

17
18 There is also information in this on the press release editing
19 process and publishing process and also the process that we use
20 for our amplification and our archiving. I promised that one
21 was going to be quick, and I think this is the quickest one, and
22 so I guess, with that, if there's any comments or thoughts on
23 our press release guidelines, I am happy to hear them.

24
25 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Seeing none, Emily, you can go ahead and move
26 on to the improvement plan.

27
28 **2022 COMMUNICATIONS IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

29
30 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Okay. Great. As you guys remember, in 2021,
31 we did our first communications improvement plan, and what that
32 really did was help make sure that our staff was sort of on the
33 same page with what we wanted to accomplish for the year, and
34 then I think it's really helpful when the council can weigh-in
35 and give us some of your thoughts.

36
37 What I will tell you is we presented -- We didn't have this
38 ready at the Outreach and Education Technical Committee, but we
39 used all of their advice from our Outreach and Education
40 Technical Committee to put this document together and to really
41 hone-in on what we wanted to do in 2022, and so I'll just
42 quickly go through each item and focus on the planned
43 improvements.

44
45 If you look at our Gulf Currents Blog, our planned improvements
46 for 2022 are to publish an article monthly, and we also want to
47 make sure that we continue to use that quarterly article digest.

1 Moving to the listserv, which is our press release email, our
2 planned improvements are to continue to develop species-specific
3 email contact lists from the Fishermen Feedback tool. In other
4 words, if you respond to one of our Something's Fishy/Fishermen
5 Feedback efforts, we will create a species-specific list for
6 you, so that, every time -- Let's say you responded to the gag
7 effort, and, every time we have gag news, I will be able to send
8 that directly to somebody who I know is intimately involved in
9 the gag fishery.

10
11 We would also like to continue to cultivate those species-
12 specific contact lists and regularly nudge people on social
13 media to join our subscriber lists, and so that's pretty simple,
14 and we just want to keep making sure that people who might want
15 to subscribe are given the opportunity to do so.

16
17 Moving to social media, we would like to transition away from
18 using Hootsuite, which is a social media scheduling tool, and
19 optimize our use of Facebook Business Suite, and so that's just
20 an internal tool that we're trying to do, and that will improve
21 our process internally.

22
23 We want to create a social media calendar, which means we know
24 what's going to go out and when it's going to go out and publish
25 things in advance. We want to increase our regularly-scheduled
26 helpful social media posts by directing anglers to helpful
27 resources, and so this is going to be a little bit more effort
28 into making sure that we're doing exactly what Susan had
29 mentioned, and this is directing people to some of the helpful
30 resources that we have on our website as well as some of the
31 other helpful sort of regional resources that fishermen might
32 want in front of their face, like the quota monitoring page,
33 infographics, things like that.

34
35 We want to continue to create recurring positive content, and,
36 also, and we've already accomplished this, but start those
37 placeholder accounts on all social media platforms.

38
39 Moving to our Fishermen Feedback tool, or our Something's Fishy
40 tool, our planned improvements are to research blanket approval
41 for the Paperwork Reduction Act, and this is a hangover from
42 last year, because we did not accomplish that, and we want to
43 create a one-page fact sheet on the tool itself, so that people
44 understand what the tool aims to accomplish, and we also want to
45 draft a guidelines document, much like the ones that you've seen
46 today, and then we need to do our rebranding, so that we make
47 sure that we change the name to Fishermen Feedback.

1 On our website, we would like to add some information on
2 fishery-independent indices to our fish science pages, and this
3 is directly after the advice of our Outreach and Education
4 Technical Committee, and we would like to add a comprehensive
5 reference list to our fish science pages, and we have a lot of
6 resources that we use at the council, and we want to make sure
7 that that reference list is available to the public.

8
9 This is something that Dylan will talk to in our next agenda
10 item, but we would like to consider dismantling the Fishing for
11 our Future website and moving the information on that website,
12 like the discard dashboard, to our fish science pages and/or to
13 the Return 'Em Right project, which is sort of taking over the
14 efforts for the descending and discard projects in the Gulf.

15
16 Then we would like to create a website style guide, just to make
17 sure that everybody who is working on our website is doing so
18 consistently, and we would also like to add a link to the final
19 action press release for each amendment to the amendment under
20 development and implemented webpages, and so this is something
21 that we have to do back in time, and then we would like to work
22 with NOAA to create a one-stop shop website of angler resources,
23 with things like quota monitoring, stock assessment reports, and
24 the MRIP query tool, and we're not really sure if that's going
25 to live on our site or their site, but it's definitely something
26 that we want to just look into, hey, if I was a fisherman, what
27 would I want on one webpage for all of my resources, and create
28 something like that.

29
30 Next, we'll move to public comment, and we want to learn the new
31 comment database and how to administrate it, and we want to re-
32 link all of our historical comment forms on the website, and
33 this is part of this integrating this new comment database, and
34 we also need to replace all of our individual comment forms with
35 pre-filled links, and so, again, this is all part of integrating
36 our new comment system into our website.

37
38 We'll move on to new things, and we would like to create a list
39 of video topics and potential contributors, and we would like to
40 shoot and edit at least four educational videos, and so this is
41 sort of creating like a video vlog, which is different than the
42 videos that we're currently creating on public hearing
43 documents, and this will be more of an educational tool,
44 hopefully, that takes advantage of our vast network of really
45 smart people in the council process.

46
47 Communication guidelines-wise, we would like to create some
48 regulations guidelines, which talk about our process and how we

1 update and maintain our regulations, because people do rely on
2 those, almost as legal documents, even though they're not, but
3 we want to make sure that the process that we go through is very
4 clear. Fishermen Feedback, as I mentioned, and then, also, how
5 we do our analytics, and so we'll create guidelines on those
6 this year.

7
8 Next, we talked about creating a species timeline project, and
9 so what that is, it's that, this year, we would like to develop
10 a sortable web-based timeline tool that hosts management
11 histories for each managed species. We're going to start with
12 amberjack, and, basically, what you'll be able to do is you will
13 pull up amberjack, and you can say show me all of the catch
14 limit increases or decreases, show me all of the bag limit
15 changes, show me all the season changes, and that will populate
16 on a timeline.

17
18 It's basically like our history of management, but it's going to
19 be sortable, and it will be interactive, and so that's kind of a
20 big undertaking.

21
22 Then the final thing on this 2022 improvement plan is we had
23 worked on an MRIP infographic, and the Outreach and Education
24 Technical Committee looked at that infographic and suggested
25 that we turn it into a web-based storyboard. As an infographic,
26 it was kind of cluttered and dense, and Dylan will talk about
27 this in the next agenda item, and so I've put this on here as
28 something that we would like to do, is find an appropriate way
29 to create a storyboard and make sort of an interactive tool,
30 rather than trying to rely on like a one-page infographic, to
31 display all the information about MRIP transitions and changes.

32
33 With that, that's sort of an overview of our communications
34 improvement plan for 2022, and I am happy to take any
35 suggestions or edits on that.

36
37 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Okay, committee. Any comments or questions
38 regarding the communications improvement plan? I am not seeing
39 any, and we'll continue to move forward. Dylan Hubbard, Captain
40 Hubbard, leads our Outreach and Education Technical Committee,
41 and, Emily, you said Captain Hubbard will actually give the
42 update from that committee?

43
44 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Yes, and he should be present and available.

45
46 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Okay. Dylan, some of that material I know
47 we've covered, and I can't remember exactly, because I haven't
48 looked at the report yet this morning again, but, if you would

1 hit the highlights, or the important ones, and, if we've
2 discussed it, we can kind of -- Emily touched on several of the
3 things that are in there.

4
5 **REMAINING ITEMS FROM THE OUTREACH AND EDUCATION TECHNICAL**
6 **COMMITTEE**
7

8 **MR. DYLAN HUBBARD:** Yes. Will do, Mr. Chair. One thing that we
9 talked about at the committee quite a bit was the in-person
10 public hearing attendance and some of the ways that we could
11 perhaps maybe better guide that advice to the council, and one
12 way was maybe doing a survey to gauge stakeholder interest in
13 attending in-person public hearings.

14
15 Some of the discussion was around the current process and
16 reviewing previous in-person efforts to those public hearings
17 and basically kind of gauging efforts, or what we could discern
18 to be effort, of people attending meetings, and then, also, the
19 committee suggested that the council should err on the side of
20 caution, and, even if we think a meeting might not be necessary,
21 to be cautious and offer it anyway, because you never know how
22 much people want to attend a meeting or want to give comment. A
23 lot of times, it could just vary based on the weather. If the
24 weather is bad, a lot of people show up. If the weather is
25 good, everybody is out running trips.

26
27 The committee also suggested that staff keep track of both the
28 number of attendees and those who actually comment, and, also,
29 to consider analytics on other efforts, like the direct mailouts
30 and the new option of doing push notifications in Fish Rules and
31 really just the overall attendance number, to track those
32 analytics and to give us a better idea of those in-person public
33 hearings and trying to cut down on the cost of doing those in
34 the best, most cautious way possible.

35
36 Also, the committee expressed support for the consideration of
37 hosting listening sessions, like currently the South Atlantic
38 does, where it would just be a local council member and a state
39 agency staff member hosting an in-person meeting, with council
40 staff joining virtually, making it a little easier and a little
41 bit more cost-effective to do them a little bit more broadly.

42
43 Also, one thing that we didn't discuss already was the Return
44 'Em Right project, and the committee heard a presentation on the
45 Return 'Em Right project, and Nick Haddad came and spoke to us
46 about the website and the tool and the program, and we spent a
47 lot of time discussing that and going through the website.

1 The committee discussed, specifically in regard to Return 'Em
2 Right, the project timeline and the encouragement of just trying
3 to amplify the message and the efforts of Return 'Em Right. If
4 you haven't checked it out already, I highly encourage everybody
5 listening to make sure you visit that website and enter your
6 email and take that course, and it's really, really cool, and
7 they've put a lot of effort into it, and it really looks good,
8 and it delivers a clear message that we all need to really work
9 hard on spreading.

10
11 Also, the committee discussed the council's Fishing for our
12 Future webpage and determined that, while it served its purpose,
13 and it was really cool, and I personally used it a lot for
14 outreach, it's now kind of more appropriate to move that over to
15 the returnemright.org website, but the discard dashboard, that
16 was so cool and so labor intensive, we want to make sure we
17 preserve that and move it to the fisheries science page on the
18 council website.

19
20 The committee passed the following motion: To eliminate the
21 Fishing for our Future webpage from the Gulf Council website and
22 redirect anybody visiting that URL to returnemright.org and then
23 add that discard dashboard and literature cited to the fisheries
24 science page of the council website.

25
26 Also, a prioritization of future communication topics was
27 discussed, and the committee was asked to help identify and
28 prioritize future communications. One of the things that we
29 talked about, or a few of the things that we talked about, was
30 wild-caught versus farm-raised seafood, the Marine Resource
31 Information Program Fishing Effort Survey and annual catch limit
32 closures, and differentiating the council and NOAA roles in
33 fishery management.

34
35 The committee suggested that, basically, the wild-caught versus
36 farm-raised should be more de-prioritized, as it's not really
37 appropriate for the council arena, and the committee felt that
38 they really should focus on other issues, like the MRIP-FES
39 issues and how it has triggered reallocation, and, also, the
40 committee supported council efforts to communicate more about
41 MRIP-FES and its fishery management implications, and it's not
42 really a council endeavor, but it definitely affects a lot of
43 council processes and decisions.

44
45 Then, with that, a really cool idea that came out was ACL
46 closures and doing a biannual report, one in January that
47 basically throws up the yellow flag and says, hey, guys, we need
48 to watch this species, and we're quota monitoring it, and it

1 could close, and then, in June, releasing another report that
2 kind of fine-tunes those expectations and it's like, hey, in
3 January, we told you that this species might have an ACL
4 closure, but never mind, and it's -- We're not there, or fine-
5 tune it to like, yes, we were right, and this thing is going to
6 close next week. That way, these ACL closures just don't come
7 out of the blue, and try to lessen the blow to all stakeholders,
8 and I think that was a really, really great idea.

9
10 Plus, we also talked about, in the committee, recommending the
11 council use short videos, or vlogs, to delineate the difference
12 between council and NOAA roles in fishery management. A lot of
13 people get confused on the two different things and how they
14 interact and what they all mean, and so using vlogs, or videos,
15 to better educate the general public on the differences.

16
17 Then, finally, the committee suggested that the council put an
18 effort towards explaining fisheries-independent data and the
19 indices of abundance.

20
21 Then, under Other Business, we talked about the MRIP-FES
22 infographic, and Emily did kind of a good job, at the end there,
23 kind of categorizing that, and, basically, the infographic was
24 too much, and you couldn't really see it, and so some sort of
25 storyboard is going to be better suited for it, somewhere on a
26 website, and the committee recommended that staff add
27 information on what data currency is used for stock assessments,
28 quota monitoring, and catch limits for each species.

29
30 Then there was a discussion on council voting procedures, but I
31 understand that's going to be moved to a different section, but
32 there was a motion in regard to that that I want to make sure
33 that the council is aware of.

34
35 The committee recommended the council continue exploring ways to
36 make virtual stakeholder meeting interaction easier, but
37 utilizing software and hardware to show vote count.

38
39 Then, with that, the only other comment that I want to make sure
40 that I reiterate is there was some discussion in the committee
41 about the negative comments and how we want to try to avoid
42 negativity, and that was very well discussed by Emily, but I
43 just want to reiterate that we had this discussion at the
44 committee, and it was very overwhelmingly, in my opinion, felt,
45 by the committee, that you have to have comments turned on.

46
47 There is really no option to turn off comments. Yes, there is a
48 setting in Facebook that you can turn off comments, but, if you

1 do that, you might as well delete your social media accounts,
2 because the amount of just total credibility loss is
3 insurmountable, because now you're just taking the ability of
4 the general public, or stakeholder groups, to have any feedback
5 in Facebook, which is the easiest place to give feedback.

6
7 What a lot of people don't know is -- They're not involved in
8 the council process, like me, four or five years ago, and I
9 thought that going onto the council's Facebook and saying my
10 piece was enough, and a lot of people get involved in fisheries
11 management through the council's social media and through those
12 continued negative posts, and it will drive people to be so
13 upset that they finally attend a council meeting and get
14 involved.

15
16 I really, really feel that the negative comments are almost a
17 positive thing. You've got to think about that neural network
18 that Emily really hit on, and this guy is always negative,
19 always saying negative comments, but his buddy might be shown
20 these Gulf Council posts, over and over again, because his other
21 negative buddy keeps commenting, and now, all of a sudden, you
22 have someone, a stakeholder, engaged that wouldn't have been
23 engaged otherwise, but he is now engaged and involved in the
24 process and adding value, because of the negative comments.

25
26 In my mind, if you turn off the ability to comment, you might as
27 well just cut the legs off of our outreach and education efforts
28 and just throw it away. It's really not an option, and that
29 concludes my report.

30
31 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** All right. Thank you, Captain Hubbard. We're
32 just about out of time for this committee, and, Susan, I see
33 that your hand is up. Did you have a question, or a comment?

34
35 **MS. BOGGS:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I do have a comment, and I
36 don't know that it's appropriate to be discussing it during this
37 committee, but Dylan did bring it up, about the Return 'Em
38 Right, and I will make this quick, but my daughter is a
39 deckhand, and she want on the site, and she did the thing, and
40 she got her descending devices in the mail.

41
42 Randy went on the site and did his thing, and he has not
43 received anything, and so just FYI. I don't know what the
44 glitch is, but I had two people do it, and only one received
45 descending devices. Thank you.

46
47 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Thanks, Susan. I am not sure what the issue is
48 there, and I do know that -- Mr. Chairman, we're out of time,

1 and there was one presentation that did address -- At least a
2 component of that presentation did address the Return 'Em Right,
3 but I don't know what your preference is here, since we're right
4 up against lunch, if we do that presentation or not, and, Leann,
5 I see your hand is up, and hang on just one second here. Emily,
6 do you know how long that presentation would take, and maybe
7 that would help inform Mr. Diaz's decision.

8
9 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Mr. Chair, I think I can knock it out in just a
10 couple of minutes. I mean, I think it's a five-minute
11 presentation, and it's just to clarify the different efforts
12 across the Gulf.

13
14 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Okay. Well, Mr. Chairman, if you want to guide
15 us on that, and, while you're thinking about that, Leann, I see
16 that your hand is up. Go ahead.

17
18 **MS. BOSARGE:** I will be quick. I think that the AP made a good
19 choice on kind of downgrading that discussion on wild-caught
20 versus farm-raised. However, that really wasn't what I was
21 hoping to see the conversation revolve around, and it was more
22 domestic versus imported, and I think that's a lot of what our
23 discussion -- I remember Mr. Dyskow bringing that up as well
24 during a council meeting, and I think maybe that's what should
25 have been evaluated, and so I hope that they can take that up in
26 the future, and I do see that as being relevant, especially when
27 you look at the roots of the Magnuson-Stevens Act in general,
28 which was to address foreign fishing in our U.S. waters.

29
30 I guess the flip side to that, the inverse, would be the
31 promotion of domestic fisheries, and so I do think it's
32 relevant, and it's something worthwhile to consider, and then
33 the other thing I hope that maybe we could consider in the
34 future, that sort of goes hand-in-hand with that domestic
35 fisheries aspect, is the promotion of the dietary guidelines
36 around the healthiness of seafood and consuming seafood in
37 general for the American public. I hope that the committee will
38 take that up at some point and we can have more discussion on
39 that in the future. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

40
41 **MR. DIAZ:** Dr. Stunz, I think you'll be fine to go ahead and do
42 that last presentation and take the time that you need to finish
43 your committee.

44
45 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Okay. Thank you, Leann. Mr. Chairman, then
46 we'll go ahead and proceed, with that in mind, and we're kind of
47 over our time, Ms. Muehlstein, and do you want to go ahead and
48 give us the presentation on the discard and barotrauma efforts

1 that are going on?

2
3 **PRESENTATION: SUMMARY OF DISCARD AND BAROTRAUMA REDUCTION**
4 **EFFORTS ACROSS THE REGION**
5

6 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Sure, and I will just do a quick overview here
7 of the different efforts that are going on across the region.

8
9 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** That's Tab O, Number 10, by the way, is your
10 presentation.

11
12 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** There we go, and so the reason that we put this
13 on the agenda is because some council members had asked for a
14 little bit of a clarification, because I know that there's a
15 number of different efforts across the region, and I just wanted
16 to sort of point out which efforts are doing what and sort of
17 where they overlap.

18
19 Really, I kind of drilled down on four different efforts, and
20 the first one I'm going to talk about is Return 'Em Right, which
21 is the NRDA/Sea Grant effort that is taking place as a result of
22 the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. The DESCEND Act is the next
23 thing I will touch on, and I will just give you a quick overview
24 of the South Atlantic Council's amendment, and then there is an
25 effort by the Nature Conservancy that I wanted to touch on as
26 well.

27
28 We'll start with Return 'Em Right, and so this is funded by the
29 NRDA Open Ocean TIG, and it is a \$30 million project that came
30 as a result of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill. Partners in
31 this effort are the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, Sea
32 Grant, NOAA Fisheries, and then the Gulf Council, and so I do
33 sit on the planning team for this and have done some work with
34 this group, and so we consider ourselves a partner in this
35 effort.

36
37 The goals of Return 'Em Right are to reduce mortality in reef
38 fish resulting from barotrauma and release, to improve angler
39 experiences with release gear, and to increase the overall
40 health of our reef fish fisheries.

41
42 There is two components to this project, and the first is the
43 education and outreach component, and it is an independently-
44 branded program, this Return 'Em Right program, that is guided
45 by anglers and grounded by science, and it promotes best release
46 practices.

47
48 As part of this education and outreach component, there is a

1 fish descending device distribution project, and so there is an
2 educational module that is a prerequisite to get gear, and so
3 anybody that wants a descending device would go online and
4 complete this educational module, and then, once that module is
5 complete, they would get that gear sent to them, and, Susan, I
6 can check in specifically to your case for Randy, and I'm not
7 sure what's going on there.

8
9 This is being launched in two separate phases. It was launched
10 for the federal for-hire fleet in the fall of 2021, and the
11 private angler launch is anticipated in sort of mid-spring of
12 2022.

13
14 There is also a research component to this project, and the
15 goals of that component are to validate biological and
16 logistical effectiveness of release methods, to develop more
17 accurate release mortality rates for high-priority reef fish, to
18 assess depredation on fish that are released using the fish
19 descender devices, and also to test the effectiveness of new
20 technologies or practices to reduce depredation.

21
22 What you will see here is the different components of the
23 research arm of this project, and there are four specific
24 projects that are going on right now, and this is just a list of
25 those and who the principal investigator is, and then, finally,
26 these monitoring components also include looking at rates of use
27 of descender devices and venting tools for the recreational
28 sector, and they are using at-sea observer programs to sort of
29 look at this device use and effectiveness. They are also trying
30 to gather this information through state surveys, the state
31 recreational data collection surveys, and also through federal
32 surveys, such as the SEFHIER program and through MRIP and the
33 for-hire survey.

34
35 That's just a very brief overview of what that effort is doing
36 in the Gulf, in relationship to descending devices and venting
37 tools and really just mitigating release mortality.

38
39 The next thing that's going on is a little bit of a different
40 kind of effort, and it's the DESCEND Act, which is the Direct
41 Enhancement of Snapper Conservation and the Economy through
42 Novel Devices. This is an act of Congress that requires people
43 aboard both commercial, for-hire, and private recreational
44 vessels in the Gulf to have a venting tool or a descending
45 device rigged and ready to use when fishing in the federal
46 waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

47
48 The DESCEND Act also does define what a descending device is,

1 and then it defines also what a venting tool is, and it will
2 show you all of those requirements there for what you need to
3 have, and then the final slide for the DESCEND Act -- I put this
4 together before January 13, but there was a comment period open
5 from November to December, and it was implemented on January 13,
6 and so it says mid-January on the slide, but just know that, as
7 of now, all reef fish anglers in the federal waters of the Gulf
8 have to have one of those defined venting tools or descending
9 devices onboard their vessel.

10
11 Also, in our region, starting on July 15 of 2020, the South
12 Atlantic Management Council created Snapper Grouper Amendment
13 29, which requires descending devices to be onboard and ready to
14 use on all vessels that are targeting snapper grouper, and
15 that's charter, commercial, and private vessels in federal
16 waters.

17
18 It also requires the use of non-offset and non-stainless-steel
19 circle hooks when fishing north of latitude 28 degrees North,
20 and it requires the use of non-stainless-steel hooks when
21 fishing for snapper grouper with hook-and-line gear with natural
22 baits in all of the federal waters.

23
24 Then, finally, there is a fourth program, and this is a program
25 that is organized by the Nature Conservancy, and it covers the
26 State of Florida, both the Gulf and Atlantic sides, and it aims
27 to cover fifty-five species of snapper and grouper, and its
28 goals are to promote the use of descending devices and to help
29 snapper and grouper species recover, and it says, ultimately,
30 resulting in less regulation, longer fishing seasons, and
31 healthier ocean and fish populations that are robust enough to
32 support both recreational and commercial fishing.

33
34 That's just a very quick overview of sort of the four programs
35 that all seem to be touching on the same issue in our region,
36 and I just wanted to present that, to clarify that, because I
37 know that some of the council members had asked for more
38 information on those different efforts.

39
40 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Well, thank you, Emily, for updating us on
41 that. Is there any questions or comments? I am not seeing any,
42 and that takes us to our last item on the agenda of Other
43 Business. Is there any other business that needs to come before
44 this committee? Mr. Gill.

45
46 **MR. GILL:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I wanted to ask whether
47 there was a planned reconvening of the O&E Tech Committee, and,
48 if so, when it was.

1
2 **MS. MUEHLSTEIN:** Thanks for that question, Mr. Gill. Typically,
3 we convene in the fall. I will be leaving on maternity leave
4 for most of the spring, and so I don't anticipate that to happen
5 anytime then, and, honestly, I think probably reconvening again
6 in the fall, like October-ish, is going to align with our
7 schedule, unless you had a suggestion otherwise.

8
9 **MR. GILL:** No, and I appreciate the information. Thank you,
10 Emily.

11
12 **CHAIRMAN STUNZ:** Seeing no other hands or other business, that
13 concludes the committee meeting for the Outreach and Education.

14
15 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on January 24, 2022.)
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