

**Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Focus Group:
Engaging the Recreational Community in the Council Management Process**

Pre-Focus Group Survey Results

The following results are from a pre-focus group survey distributed to the invited participants of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council Focus Group: *Engaging the Recreational Community in the Council Process* to be held December 2-3, 2011 at the Pier 5 Hotel in Baltimore, MD. The online survey was made available to confirmed participants and remained open until November 29th, during which time 23 responses were collected.

This summary is intended to communicate the results of the survey to focus group participants. Questions appear in the same order as in the original survey, with aggregated responses following each question. Responses have been combined to protect the privacy of respondents and to reflect trends in the survey.

If you have any questions or comments about this survey, please contact Katie Latanich (cal7@duke.edu or (252) 504-7642).

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The following statement appeared on the first page of the pre-focus group survey:

Dear Workshop Participant,

You have been invited to participate in a workshop hosted by the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) on engaging the recreational community in the Council management process. The Fisheries Leadership & Sustainability Forum, a partnership that includes Duke University's Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy Solutions; and Loftus Consulting are providing technical and logistical support for this process.

The following survey is intended to provide us with information about your thoughts and preferences for communicating with the Council and participating in the Council process. The Fisheries Forum and Loftus Consulting will use the information gathered in this survey to inform the discussions at this workshop. Your participation will help us create a meaningful opportunity to provide the Council with your suggestions for engaging the recreational community.

The survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. Although you are free to skip questions, or stop taking the survey at any time, we appreciate your response to every question. There are no correct or incorrect responses, so please answer as honestly and completely as possible. We will not ask you for any identifying information. The combined results of the survey will be made available prior to the workshop in December but individual responses are confidential.

If you have any questions, concerns or technical difficulties please contact Katie Latanich (cal7@duke.edu or (252) 504-7642). This survey will remain open until Monday, November 28. Paper copies of this survey should be returned to Katie at the address below, no later than this date.

Thank you in advance for your participation. We look forward to working with you in December.

Sincerely,

Katie Latanich, Program Manager (katie.latanich@duke.edu)
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1. Which of the following roles do you play in the Mid-Atlantic summer flounder, scup, and/or black sea bass fisheries? Please check all that apply.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Recreational angler	73.9%	17
Leader or member of a sport fishing club, organization, association, advocacy group, etc.	73.9%	17
Guide boat (typically 2 passengers or fewer)	0.0%	0
Charter boat owner and/or operator or crew (2-6 passengers)	13.0%	3
Party boat owner and/or operator or crew (6 or more passengers)	17.4%	4
Tackle shop retail owner or employee	13.0%	3
Sportfishing manufacturer, distributor, or non-retail industry	4.3%	1
Sportfishing media	13.0%	3
Boating sales/service provider (for example, marina owner, operator or employee)	0.0%	0
Other (please explain)	4.3%	1
Comments		3
	<i>answered question</i>	23
	<i>skipped question</i>	0

Survey respondents also commented to note their service on Council advisory bodies, leadership of a regional diving organization, prior experience in sportfishing journalism, and spearfishing experience.

2. In which state do you most often fish recreationally for summer flounder, scup, and/or black sea bass? Please check one.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Massachusetts	0.0%	0
Rhode Island	9.1%	2
Connecticut	9.1%	2
New York	18.2%	4
New Jersey	27.3%	6
Delaware	4.5%	1
Maryland	18.2%	4
Virginia	4.5%	1
North Carolina	9.1%	2
	<i>answered question</i>	22
	<i>skipped question</i>	1

3. Where do you usually fish for summer flounder, scup, or black sea bass? Please check the box that best describes your fishing effort for each species.

Answer Options	From shore	Near shore (<3 miles)	Offshore (>3 miles)	I don't target this species	Response Count
Summer Flounder	1	16	5	1	23
Scup	0	6	6	10	22
Black Sea Bass	0	7	16	0	23
<i>answered question</i>					23
<i>skipped question</i>					0

4. The Council is interested in improving communications with the recreational community. Which of the following topics related to Council outreach and communication would you be most interested to discuss at the workshop? Please check all that apply. Options are ordered here by decreasing frequency of response.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
On-line (Internet) media; for example, press releases, newsletters, announcements, and opportunities to tailor these publications to the recreational community	86.4%	19
Cooperation with other Council bodies (for example, Advisory Panel members) and/or non-Council entities to disseminate Council information and materials more widely	63.6%	14
Targeted mailings and communication with the recreational community; for example, opt-in mailing lists organized by region or target species	59.1%	13
Traditional print media; for example, press releases, newsletters, announcements, and opportunities to tailor these publications to the recreational community	54.5%	12
In-person appearances and meet-and-greet opportunities with Council members and staff (meetings, trade shows, etc.)	54.5%	12
Interactive video meetings (for example, virtual public hearings, webinars, live chats)	45.5%	10
Interactive platforms such as blogs, forums and message boards	36.4%	8
Social media such as Twitter and Facebook	31.8%	7
Real time video streaming of Council meetings	18.2%	4
Other (please explain)	0.0%	0
Comments and additional suggestions		4
<i>answered question</i>		22
<i>skipped question</i>		1

Survey respondents provided the following comments and additional suggestions:

- Utilize print media in sportfishing magazines
- Online message boards are often dominated by a particular perspective and are not a practical way for the Council communicate. They could provide a platform to present facts and counteract misinformation, but this would require a full-time Council presence.
- The Council needs to improve communications with private recreational anglers since they represent the majority of fishing trips. The interests of

for-hire vessels are better represented.

- The Council's efforts to increase outreach are perceptible and appreciated

5. Please comment on any other aspects of communication (for example, frequency, timing, and level of detail of meetings or material) that you feel are important to discuss at the workshop and convey to the Council.

11 responses, 12 skipped

Most respondents focused on desirable qualities and attributes of Council communications, and/or provided specific recommendations for improving communications.

Qualities and attributes of Council communications:

- Streamlined; a single familiar recurring process
- Prioritized; the recreational community is notified in advance of relevant materials and upcoming decisions and changes
- Targeted; information and updates provided by species, topic, and/or fishing method of interest (e.g. spearfishing)
- Simple language
- Concise documents
- Timely, i.e. information is provided in advance of meetings and decisions, and minutes and outcomes are available shortly after meetings

Additional ideas and recommendations:

- Provide access to the same information available to Council and Board members
- Provide explanations of the rationale behind Council actions and conclusions, in order to counteract misinformation
- Publish meeting minutes as soon as possible following Council meetings
- Avoid changing regulations after a season opens

Other participants responded that their answer would depend on the outcome of this meeting; and that the Council's goals for communication are fine but the Council should focus on making fishing better.

6. What improvements in your ability to participate in the Council process would you like to see as a result of this workshop?

14 responses, 9 skipped

Most responses focused on supporting participation through improved Council communications. Some respondents recommended specific next steps and outcomes.

Recommendations and outcomes for improving council communications:

- Support more communication with the recreational community
- Establish ongoing channels for communication
- Enable the recreational community to provide feedback quickly and in real time, on an ongoing basis

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- Continue to use interactive sessions
- Make meetings accessible to more people, e.g. interactive web-based
- Provide more advance notice of meetings
- Provide additional ways for the public to provide feedback, such as web-based surveys

Specific next steps, products, and outcomes:

- An action plan and commitment to a greater emphasis on socioeconomic concerns of the recreational fishing community
- A description of the timeline and process for providing public comment
- Link information and press releases to opportunities for participation, so that the public is aware of opportunities to comment
- More reciprocity within and between neighboring states

Other respondents noted that they: wanted to hear additional input before making recommendations; were satisfied with their ability to participate in the Council process and felt that participation for the purpose of supporting a position without adding substance would hinder the process; were optimistic that the Council was asking this question of the recreational community and viewed this focus group as the beginning of a process and not an endpoint; and were attending their first meeting and had no basis for a response. Another respondent expressed dissatisfaction with MRFSS data and observed that management is driven by overfishing emergencies.

7. Recognizing that the Council must balance many opinions in the process of establishing recreational regulations, what elements of this process would make you feel that the Council had listened to your input?

16 responses, 7 skipped

Many responses focused on the Council acknowledging and responding to public input. Respondents recommended that the Council:

- Acknowledge and/or publish public comments and positions (including online)
- Respond to comments and major discussion points
- Provide a reason for final outcomes and decisions
- Provide insight into how comments and input were considered
- Reference specific comments and information
- Turn comments and information into action items for follow-up
- Provide feedback and follow-up to participants, e.g. notification if the Council does or does not discuss an opinion and an explanation; feedback on what changes might be implemented
- Give the same consideration to recreational anglers that is given other groups, including managers, scientists and environmentalists

Other respondents commented that they want to see action and implementation as a result of their input, and not feel that decisions are determined prior to public input. One respondent acknowledged that it can be difficult to separate the process of participation from the outcome. Some respondents felt their input is heard via their representatives or through existing public comment opportunities; one respondent also felt that some Council members represent

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particular interests or points of view, and that only some Council members will truly listen. Another respondent felt that the results of this meeting will determine whether they feel that they are listened to.

Some respondents focused on specific issues and outcomes that they would like to see the Council consider, including:

- Real-time monitoring of recreational fisheries
- Prioritization of reef restoration
- Greater cooperation between federal and state entities
- Decisions that reflect that fishermen are as important as fish

8. Please describe your familiarity and level of participation in the Council process for setting recreational regulations for summer flounder, scup, and black sea bass.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I currently participate in the regulatory process and am <i>very</i> familiar	31.8%	7
I currently participate in the regulatory process and am <i>somewhat</i> familiar	40.9%	9
I do not currently participate in the regulatory process but am <i>very</i> familiar	13.6%	3
I do not currently participate in the regulatory process but am <i>somewhat</i> familiar	13.6%	3
I am not familiar at all with how the Council establishes fishing regulations	0.0%	0
Comments		7
<i>answered question</i>		22
<i>skipped question</i>		1

Some respondents commented on the nature of their participation. Responses included following council activity, providing comments on FMPs, serving on advisory panels and previously serving on the council. One respondent also noted that it is difficult to be “very” familiar with the process given the history and complexity of the Council and associated regulations.

9. Please describe your familiarity with the Mid-Atlantic Council’s “Visioning Project.”

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I am very familiar with the Visioning Project	18.2%	4
I am somewhat familiar with the Visioning Project	27.3%	6
I have heard of the Visioning Project but am not familiar with the details	40.9%	9
I have never heard of the Visioning Project	13.6%	3
<i>answered question</i>		22
<i>skipped question</i>		1

10. Please describe your participation in the Visioning Project to date. Check all that apply.

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
I am a member of the Visioning Project Advisory Panel	13.6%	3
I have attended and/or listened to a council meeting or Advisory Panel discussion about the Visioning Project	4.5%	1
I have talked with Council staff at one of the Visioning events	9.1%	2
I have read the Visioning Project Roadmap	13.6%	3
I have read press releases and council communications about the Visioning Project	27.3%	6
I have visited the Council's Visioning Project website	31.8%	7
I have completed the Visioning Survey	27.3%	6
I have completed one or more of the species-specific Visioning Surveys	18.2%	4
I have not participated in the Visioning Project to date	31.8%	7
I am not familiar with the Visioning Project.	18.2%	4
	<i>answered question</i>	22
	<i>skipped question</i>	1