



Joint Tilefish and Communication and Outreach Advisory Panel Meeting Summary September 28, 2022

The Tilefish and Communication and Outreach Advisory Panels (AP) met jointly via webinar on Wednesday, September 28, 2022, to discuss ways to improve angler awareness of, and compliance with, private recreational tilefish permitting and reporting requirements. Briefing materials considered by the Advisory Panels are available on the [meeting page](#).

Advisory Panel Attendees: Dan Farnham, Jr., Doug Zemeckis, Fiona Hogan, Fred Akers, Jeff Deem, Kara Gross, Lauren Salter, Matthew Hamilton, Steve Heins, Willy Goldsmith, Francine Karp

Council Staff: Hannah Hart, José Montañez, Jason Didden, Mary Sabo, Kiley Dancy

Additional Attendees: Doug Potts (GARFO), Ari Winer

Summary

Hannah Hart and José Montañez opened the meeting with a brief presentation which provided background on the issue, an overview of past outreach efforts, and a list of potential outreach options for AP consideration and discussion. Following the presentation, the APs had a lengthy discussion related to the questions listed below.

Discussion questions:

- What are the primary barriers to angler awareness?
- What are the primary barriers to angler compliance?
- What type of outreach materials, approaches, and venues would be helpful to improve awareness?
- What type of messaging would build awareness and compliance?

Key Discussion Points and AP Recommendations

Target Audience: In general, it is going to be challenging to drill down to the target audience if we focus on the entire recreational community. Instead, outreach should be directed to a core group of recreational tilefish permit holders and HMS permit holders.

Outreach to Tilefish Permit Holders: Current recreational tilefish permit holders were informed about reporting requirements when they applied for the permit. However, tilefish is not a primary species for most anglers, so sustained outreach efforts to permit holders may be required. The Council and GARFO should consider sending targeted information and/or periodic reminders directly to existing tilefish permit holders. Friendly outreach to the existing tilefish permit holders would be very effective. It might be helpful to mention the possibility of increased enforcement efforts in the future.

Outreach to HMS Permit Holders: Outreach efforts should also be directed toward HMS permit holders, some of whom may not be aware of the recreational tilefish permitting and reporting requirements. One advisor noted that “every HMS permit holder is a potential tilefish fisherman.” AP members offered several specific suggestions:

- Add a blurb about the tilefish permitting requirement (with a link for more information) to the HMS Permits page and other relevant HMS pages (Council staff have already requested this)
- Send an email or snail mail notice out to HMS permit holders
- Put a notice in relevant HMS publications (e.g., newsletters) and other outreach products

Dual Reporting: There is frustration with the lack of coordination between the tilefish and HMS reporting systems. Combining these systems (i.e., one-stop reporting) would help with angler compliance, as it would make the reporting process less time consuming. GARFO staff noted that this effort is ongoing.

Communicating the Benefits to Anglers: The existing outreach materials do not explain what the benefit might be to anglers. Among some anglers there is a sense that reporting will only lead to closures. It would be good to explain how the data will be used beyond just tracking harvest against the ACL. If there are opportunities to demonstrate tangible benefits, that would go a long way. Similarly, we need to communicate the possibility of overfishing the stock if anglers do not comply with reporting requirements. Getting anglers to report zero harvest is an inherent challenge, and effective messaging is key.

Feedback on Existing Outreach Materials: In general, outreach products need to be simplified. The GARFO rack card and flyer use too many acronyms, they do not use angler-centric language, and the reporting instructions are confusing. People may tune out if they feel overwhelmed with information. Council and/or NMFS staff should develop a new outreach product that incorporates some of these ideas (simplicity, more focused on benefits, angler-centric language) for distribution to tilefish and/or HMS permit holders.

New Ways to Engage: Past communication efforts were likely most effective with people who were already receptive or looking for the information. We need to consider using more creative methods, such as prizes, lotteries, contests, etc., to engage and inform anglers. (Also need to be aware of perverse incentives for overreporting if the "prize" is too big).

Outreach Timing: Major outreach efforts (e.g., Outreach to HMS permit holders) should be delayed until next spring when there will be another wave of permit applications and increased offshore fishing activity.

Enforcement: We should look at examples in other fisheries/regions where increased enforcement was used to increase compliance with new recreational fishing rules. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection has been posting enforcement stops on social media. This generates chatter about reporting requirements. Maybe something similar could be done with tilefish enforcement.

Additional suggestions: Other specific comments and suggestions included:

- Social media is a good tool for catching peoples' attention and disseminating simple messages
- Coordinate with SeaGrant to get the message out in each state
- Consider publishing a blurb about the requirements in publications such as Saltwater Sportsman. This would be most effective if it is shared across their social media pages.
- Outreach materials should include a QR code that leads to FAQs or some other document/webpage that highlights the benefits of reporting.