



# COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH OVERVIEW

## Introduction

Communication and outreach are critical to effective engagement of stakeholders in the fisheries management process. The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) has a diverse audience of stakeholders that must be reached using a variety of communication tools and methods. The purpose of this document is to provide the Council with an overview of existing communication tools and methods and to facilitate discussion regarding the future direction of the Council's communication and outreach program.

## 2014-2018 Strategic Plan

*The Council's overall communication goals and objectives are rooted in its 2014-2018 Strategic Plan. The core elements of the plan are provided in the section below.*

### Council Vision

Healthy and productive marine ecosystems supporting thriving, sustainable marine fisheries that provide the greatest overall benefit to stakeholders.

### Council Mission

The Council manages marine fisheries in federal waters of the Mid-Atlantic region for their long-term sustainability and productivity consistent with the National Standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. The Council is committed to the effective stewardship of these fisheries and associated habitats by incorporating scientific information and informed public input in transparent processes that produce fishery management plans and programs.

### Core Values

- Stewardship
- Integrity
- Effectiveness
- Fairness
- Competence
- Clear Communication

### Communication Goal

Engage, inform, and educate stakeholders to promote public awareness and encourage constructive participation in the Council process.

## Communication Objectives and Strategies

Objectives	Strategies
<b>Objective 1.</b> <i>Develop and implement a strategic communications plan to provide clear and accurate information to a broad range of stakeholders.</i>	1.1. Employ a variety of written, visual, and oral communication methods appropriate for a diverse audience of stakeholders.
	1.2. Expand the use of technology to streamline the communication process.
	1.3. Use the Council's website to provide stakeholders with easy access to accurate and up-to-date information.
	1.4. Provide stakeholders with timely news and updates via email distribution list and website.
	1.5. Ensure that all communication products meet the federal plain language guidelines.
	1.6. Develop communication templates and communication guidelines for staff and Council members.
<b>Objective 2.</b> <i>Engage a diverse audience of stakeholders.</i>	2.1. Conduct a stakeholder analysis to identify target audiences for Council communications.
	2.2. Develop and maintain a database of stakeholder contact information, including a list of key industry leaders.
	2.3. Coordinate communication efforts with management partners and other organizations to reduce redundancy and expand the distribution of messages to a broader audience.
	2.4. Use targeted communication to increase the number of stakeholders in the Council's contact database.
<b>Objective 3.</b> <i>Increase stakeholder trust and facilitate greater stakeholder engagement by making the Council process accessible and transparent.</i>	3.1. Provide conference lines or Webinar access to Council and advisory body meetings whenever it is feasible.
	3.2. Maintain an online calendar of meetings and events with links to meeting materials and supplemental information.
	3.3. Establish a consistent process for collecting and analyzing public input and incorporating it into the decision-making process.
	3.4. Summarize public comments received on specific actions and explain how public input was used in management decisions.
	3.5. Ensure that briefing books, presentations, and other meeting documents provide sufficient background information to be understood by the general public.
<b>Objective 4.</b> <i>Increase awareness and understanding of fishery science and management.</i>	4.1. Partner with academic institutions and non-governmental organizations to develop workshops and other interactive educational opportunities for stakeholders.
	4.2. Collaborate with academic and research institutions to develop outreach materials that explain fisheries science and data collection.
	4.3. Develop plain-language outreach materials to educate the public about the Council's legislative mandates and the fisheries management process.
	4.4. Use the results of the Visioning Project to promote general public understanding of fisheries science and management.
<b>Objective 5.</b> <i>Increase stakeholder involvement in the development of fishery management actions.</i>	5.1. Hold workshops to facilitate collaborative development of innovative management approaches among fishermen, managers, and scientists.
	5.2. Identify and implement additional opportunities for stakeholders to ask questions and make general comments.
	5.3. Ensure that meetings are advertised and conducted in such a way that encourages and enables stakeholder attendance and participation.
	5.4. Provide stakeholders with sufficient background information to provide constructive input

	5.5. Educate stakeholders about the Council process.
	5.6. Utilize an informal, small group meeting format to gather input from “hard to reach” interests via Listening Sessions or Q&A sessions.
	5.7. Ensure that scoping and public hearings are held in locations with high concentrations of interested stakeholders.
	5.8. Use targeted communication methods to solicit public input on management actions.

## Stakeholder Audiences

The Council has a diverse audience of stakeholders, ranging from those who actively participate in the management process to those who only want to remain informed about Council issues. Primary audiences include:

- Commercial fishing industry
- Recreational fishing sector
- Environmental NGOs
- Academic/Research Institutions
- Media
- Management Partners
- Other Individuals – seafood consumers, recreational users, general public

## Communication Methods and Tools

*The following section provides an overview of the primary communication methods and tools currently employed by the Council.*

### Web-Based Communication

#### General

- Council Website: [www.mafmc.org](http://www.mafmc.org)
- Central hub for information and materials related to Council issues and actions
- Redesigned in 2012 with the objective of providing stakeholders easy access to accurate and up-to-date information
- All Council documents posted on the website
- Updated on a nearly daily basis
- Pages can be updated at any time and from any computer, making it easy to post documents and information in a timely manner
- Entire website is mobile-friendly
- Website Traffic – Recent Daily Averages:
  - 3,971 Visits
  - 9,627 Page Views
  - 2,910 Audience Size

#### Council News

- [www.mafmc.org/news](http://www.mafmc.org/news)
- Chronological archive of all Council news items
- Includes press releases, meeting agendas, announcements

- Occasionally used for cross-distribution of news items on behalf of management partners
- Most recent 4-5 stories appear on home page
- News items are organized by tags, allowing users to filter news items to view only those related to a specific issue, such as “Deep Sea Coral”

### Calendar

- [www.mafmc.org/council-events/](http://www.mafmc.org/council-events/)
- Calendar block on the sidebar of each web page gives users easy access to upcoming events in an easy to navigate manner
- Chronological list of all future and past meetings and events
- Each meeting page contains date, time, location, and meeting details in a consistent and user-friendly format
- Pages are organized by categories and tags, allowing users to filter events based on criteria such as “Advisory Panel Meetings” or “Blueline Tilefish”
- Very positive user feedback

### Council Meeting Pages

- [www.mafmc.org/meetings](http://www.mafmc.org/meetings)
- Contains links to pages for individual Council meetings back to 2010
- Older materials also available through links to briefing books, meeting summaries, and agendas
- Briefing materials, presentations, and webinar recordings are linked directly into meeting agendas, allowing users to easily access related materials during Council meetings

### Fishery Pages

- Example: <http://www.mafmc.org/sf-s-bsb/>
- Individual pages for each Council fishery management plan are linked from sidebar
- Each page contains comprehensive information about the fishery
- Pages contain: background information about the FMP, species profiles, latest news, upcoming meetings, ongoing actions, links to amendments and frameworks, staff contact information, and links to relevant committees, advisory panels, and other related pages

### Action Pages

- [www.mafmc.org/council-actions](http://www.mafmc.org/council-actions)
- Individual pages for each major Council action serve as a one stop shop for all information and documents related to that action
- Pages contain: an action overview, a summary of the current status of the action, staff contact information, related news items, upcoming meetings, and a list of related documents

### Council Member and Staff Pages

- [www.mafmc.org/members](http://www.mafmc.org/members) and [www.mafmc.org/staff](http://www.mafmc.org/staff)
- Among the most frequently visited pages
- Contain links to pages for individual members
- Member photos and biographies are intended to help familiarize the public with individual Council members and staff

### Online Comment Submission Forms

- Example: <http://www.mafmc.org/comments/unmanaged-forage-amendment-comments>

- Stakeholders have the option to submit comments on Council actions through web-based forms (in addition to email, mail, and fax options)
- Useful for actions with high volumes of public comments

## Mailing Lists

### Email

- Approximately 2,200 email contacts (and growing)
- Contact database and email distribution are managed using iContact email marketing platform
- Emails include press releases, meeting agendas, announcements, requests for proposals (RFPs), and other important news
- Typically 1-2x per month
- Users are able to manage their email preferences and subscribe/unsubscribe without having to contact Council staff
- Council also maintains sub-lists of contacts who wish to receive news about specific issues or fisheries – can be used for more targeted email campaigns about current actions, such as unmanaged forage
- Individuals can sign up for the Council’s email list at [www.mafmc.org/email-list](http://www.mafmc.org/email-list)

### Snail Mail

- Approximately 800 contacts (declining)
- Only receive Council meeting agendas

## Social Media

- Council maintains an active Twitter account: <https://twitter.com/MidAtlanticFish>
- Useful for reaching a broader audience and engaging in two-way dialogue with stakeholders
- Majority of posts relate directly to MAFMC news and activities
- Also useful for sharing other news and announcements from management partners that may be of interest to Council stakeholders
- Council does not currently have an active Facebook page

## Web-Based Meetings

- Web-based streaming for all Council meetings and many Committee/AP/SSC/Other meetings
- Adobe Connect platform – has received very positive feedback from stakeholders
- User-friendly interface – no login or prior authorization required
- Users can hear audio *and* see presentations, motions, and notes on the screen
- Option to allow participants to participate remotely *or* listen only
- Webinar recordings include both audio and presentations

## Workshops

- Held on an as-needed basis
- Designed to solicit more in-depth participation and engagement from stakeholders
- Often includes participation from outside experts
- Workshop information and documents are archived at [www.mafmc.org/workshops-events/](http://www.mafmc.org/workshops-events/)

## Fact-to-Face Meetings

- Public hearings, scoping meetings, and Q&As/Listening Sessions

- Scheduled on an as-needed basis
- Typically held in ports or other locations with high concentrations of stakeholders
- Opportunity for dialogue between stakeholders and Council staff/members

## Publications, Documents, and Print Materials

- Briefing Books
- Advisory Panel Information Documents
- Press Releases
- Meeting Summaries
- Fact Sheets
- Workshop Reports
- Regulations Brochure
- Scoping and Public Hearing Documents
- Navigating the Council Process booklet
- MAFMC Infographic (2012)

## Proposed Future Activities

- Develop public comment guidelines
- Update and enhance Fishing Community section of website - <http://www.mafmc.org/communities/>
- Expand stakeholder contact database
- Update and expand lists of stakeholder groups (i.e. commercial fishing associations, recreational fishing clubs, environmental NGOs)
- Increase the use of targeted email lists to provide updates to stakeholders interested in specific issues, fisheries, and actions
- Expand the Council's photo library and integrate new photo galleries into website
- Activate Council Facebook page
- Increase the creation and distribution of fact sheets and outreach materials pertaining to high-interest or controversial Council issues
- Update MAFMC infographic with recent fishery facts and statistics

## Issues for Discussion

- Does the Council endorse the overall direction of the communication and outreach approach as described above?
- How can the Council better address the objectives and strategies identified in the 2014-2018 Strategic Plan?
- Are there any issues with the current communication and outreach tools that you would like to see addressed?
- Specific suggestions for communication and outreach activities in 2017/2018?