

Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council
Recreational - Charter Fishing Working Group Meeting
February 22, 2017

Working Group Meeting Summary

Meeting Agenda

1. Welcome Back, Review of Agenda
2. Review of Initial Workshop, Public Meetings
3. Develop a Set of Best Practices for Blue Angler
4. Process for Program Participation
5. Public Comment
6. Review Discussions, Draft Recommendations

Major Points of Discussion

1. The working group was welcomed back and reminded of the charge from the Advisory Council. Will Benson, working group chair, gave a brief overview of his presentation to the Sanctuary Advisory Council about the working group's progress. The council was receptive of the progress, and looks forward to the final recommendations. Will noted that the goal today is to create a draft framework to be presented to the council at the April 18 meeting.
2. Members of the working group gave overviews of each public engagement meeting.
 - Marathon, with one member of public in attendance. The discussion centered on best anchoring practices, and incentives for Blue Angler.
 - Islamorada, with no members of the public in attendance.
 - Key West, with two members of the public in attendance. The discussion focused on best practices in regards to fish fighting and handling, and the naming of Blue Angler.

Working group members discussed reasons for poor attendance at these meetings. It was noted that voluntary programs might not draw as much passion as regulatory measures.

Discussion centered on ideas to increase marketing:

- Create a rack card describing the program
- Increase outreach efforts by speaking at board meetings, captains meetings, etc
- Word of mouth by participants
 - Create set of talking points to be used by working group members and participants of the program

3. The working group discussed the homework from the initial workshop, where they were asked to identify best practices that should be included and excluded from the program. It was noted that this program would be tailored to those captains and guides striving for excellence. Which best practices would serve to set them apart from a captain or guide not included in the program? Discussion followed:

Best Practices to Include:

- Comply with legal standards, exceed ethical standards
 - Captains act as stewards while on the water
- Captains will create an atmosphere through educational briefing
 - Ala carte educational information: each captain can then individualize information
 - Can educate even if fish aren't biting
- Learn and obey the angling and boating regulations
 - Know and follow the law - No Excuses, stay updated
 - Be able to find regulations and guide others to regulations and good information
- Treat other anglers, boaters, and property owners with respect
- Trip Planning - know whether you are going to keep or release fish, plan from the start
 - Proper equipment on board (i.e. type of anchor)
- Appropriate tackle and bait for environment, water temperature, minimize air exposure, fight time, landing, etc - even if not required
 - Prepare gear for best handling practices for release and fight, anchoring
 - Rubberized Nets, barotrauma, no sunscreen on the hands, catch and release practices
 - Release nets, descenders and barotrauma relief devices
 - Emphasize practice of catch and release, leave in water if possible, bring tools to help release/limit contact and slime removal
 - Limit handling and air exposure, release in best condition possible
 - Dark wet towel for wrapping up fish out of water
- Preserve and protect native vegetation and wildlife as part of the natural environment
 - Bird release, marine mammal/turtle entanglement, etc
- Reporting illegal actions (including hazards), set an example
 - Open lines of communication with law enforcement - how to report: groundings, injured wildlife, algae blooms, etc.
- Limit and dispose of waste properly on vessels
 - Fueling at dock
 - Cleaners
 - Bottom Paint
 - Oil Changes
 - Plastic/Recycle
 - Proper disposal of trash, used line, NOTHING goes in water
- Ethical fish harvesting - take what you need and know when to turn it off
 - Avoid targeting the species that are spawning
 - Ethical treatment of live bait
- Guest safety - Up to date flares, life jackets, fire extinguishers

Best Practices to Exclude:

- Do not require use of certain types of terminal tackle (i.e. lead). Should not be excluded for using legal tackle
- Need to clarify differences between sailfish vs. tarpon/sharks concerning release. Cannot have one required method for every species
- Do not require display of stickers on boat, or code of conduct

- Best practices should be recommendations

During the best practices discussion, there were questions that arose regarding program participation requirements (i.e. continuing education, conservation activity, etc.) which will be noted below (see number 4).

The working group followed with a discussion on how to conduct the educational briefing. Including questions such as “Where are you staying? Do you have a kitchen? Cooler? Planning to take some fish home?” will ensure expectations of the day are met by both captain and client. Which methods can a captain use to maintain expectations?

- Be aware of Facebook postings/marketing materials - always show best practices
- Ensure expectations are managed by planning trip ahead of time
 - What we are going to catch, where we are going to catch them
 - What else may we see? Facts about wildlife
 - Why certain areas are protected - FKNMS, NPS, USFWS, etc
- Having a laminated card to reference (similar to Blue Star briefing card)
- Let client know where to find more information
- Communicate that most important thing of today’s trip is to ensure success of tomorrow’s trip

4. The final discussion of the day surrounded the process for program participation, including eligibility, evaluation, training, continuing education, and other requirements of the program.

Discussion items included:

- Eligibility: is captain's license enough? Should there be a requirement of experience? What if a captain has a dual-purpose license? Resolution to this discussion remained that the program should be open to charter captains regardless of their license type or experience level to ensure broad participation, as long as they agree to the mission statement.
- Evaluation: working group members discussed the best evaluation tool could be a meet and greet at the docks as the charter returns. The program coordinator or volunteer could speak with the clients to ensure successful messaging. In addition, captains could opt-in to a ride along, and may see benefits such as increased marketing from media obtained on that ride along by the program coordinator/volunteer. In addition, there could be an online survey, checks into TripAdvisor comments, etc to ensure high standard of operators.
- Training: An initial training should be rigorous and include aspects of inshore, offshore, and flats fishing, the best practices, and different habitats. Training could be done in person or online. Annual refresher trainings should be done online and take less time than initial trainings. These annual trainings keep the program up to date and maintain the level of excellence expected of captains participating. The addition of quarterly newsletters could help maintain education throughout the year, could provide a quick refresher for captains and guides, and a way to highlight participating guides.
- Continuing Education: the working group agreed that continuing education is paramount to the success of the program. Participants will be able to meet this requirement in a

number of different avenues, including community lectures, council meetings, etc. In addition, there could be an annual dialogue meeting to discuss the program and interact with sanctuary management, which could fulfill the continuing education and refresher training requirements.

- Conservation Activity: working group members agreed that a conservation activity would be beneficial to the program, especially if multiple activities could fulfill this requirement (i.e. beach cleanup, outreach event, etc)

5. Public Comment was heard from one individual, summary is included below:

Greg Friedman, citizen

We are facing an uphill battle for this resource, and we all share the common thread of this resource, which is critical to all of you and your lives. Having a standard of shared knowledge, dedication and commitment to continuing education is crucial to preserving this resource. We need to look at big picture of independent operators - from the “don’t tell me what to do” attitude to working together as stewards of resource. This means we need to figure out how to standardize the ethic, how to keep those standards, how to certify, etc. You all are doing a wonderful job of that here today.

6. The working group closed by discussing the name of the program. In order to ensure success, utilizing the brand of “Blue Star” may be the best strategy. Suggestions included: Blue Star Captain, Blue Star Fishing Professional, and Blue Star Charter Captain. After a quick vote, Blue Star Fishing Guide was decided as the best name to date.

Will Benson closed the working group by thanking the members for volunteering their time. This program would not be successful without their input, and he hopes to collaborate again in the future. NOAA and FKNMS were acknowledged for hosting the working group, and it was noted the next step is a presentation of the draft framework at the April 18th SAC meeting.