



## **Evaluation of Marine Outreach and Education USVI Style: Improving Fishing Community Awareness and Compliance**

*Executive Summary*

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The Marine Outreach and Education Virgin Islands Style (MOES-VI) brand acts as an umbrella to a number of projects. The Improving Fishing Community Awareness and Compliance Project (IFCACP) is one of these projects. The MOES-VI IFCACP is a collaboration between the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP), NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS or NOAA Fisheries Service), U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI), Department of Planning and Natural Resources (DPNR), and the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council (CFMC). DPNR hosts the MOES-VI IFCACP implementation with support from the NMFS/CRCP USVI Fisheries Liaison.

The MOES-VI IFCACP addresses key USVI priorities around building awareness and understanding of management, rules, and regulations relevant to USVI, including ways to encourage accurate reporting at the community level, which in turn leads to better informed management decisions and greater application of conservation-driven actions. Core workshop topics include annual catch limits (ACLs), commercial catch data, and commercial catch reports (CCR). In addition to building fishers' awareness, the project works toward improving DPNR technical and staff capacity to implement an efficient fisher licensing and registration process.

Since their inception in 2012, the workshops have grown to include partner organization presentations from other agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Workshops and registration for commercial fishers' licenses occur over a 3-day period by appointment during the second and third weeks of July each year. NOAA Fisheries Service's Southeast Regional Office hired Blue Earth Consultants, LLC (Blue Earth) to develop and implement an evaluation tool in 2015 and following years as a mechanism to assess the effectiveness of the annual MOES-VI IFCACP fisher registration workshops.

The following report shares findings from the evaluation of the 2015 MOES-VI IFCACP fisher registration workshops held in St. Croix (STX), USVI, during the second week of July, and in St. Thomas (STT), USVI, during the third week of July. Blue Earth assessed the effectiveness of the new fisher registration process and training module, and the following report aims to help inform DPNR, NMFS and NOAA CRCP as they make adjustments and refinements to their MOES-VI IFCACP program and workshops. The report describes the development and implementation of the evaluation methodology and tool, the results of the evaluations completed by fishers, Blue Earth staff observations during the workshops, and recommendations for changes or improvements to the fisher registration and workshop processes.



## **Major Recommendations based on Short Term Objectives:**

### ***Workshops***

Workshop recommendations are organized by the following categories: venue, communication and outreach, coordination and personnel, Spanish translation, and presentations.

#### **1. Venue:**

- Increase capacity of venue location by finding a larger space with equipment access/capability and also holding the STT workshop more conveniently in a mid-island location for fishers in St. John.

#### **2. Communication and Outreach:**

- Improve existing outreach engagement plan by announcing annual workshop and any changes (e.g., banners, press releases, and “workshop in progress” signs on doors) with formal commitment by partners to assist with plan implementation, as well as adding a social media aspect to the outreach engagement plan (e.g., Facebook posts on partner sites and websites, emails, text messages, and Radio public service announcements).

#### **3. Coordination and Personnel:**

- Improve workshop process by allowing a 15-30 minute transition time in between workshops, evaluating the scheduling order of outreach speakers on the agenda, and moving late fishers to the following workshop to avoid disruption.
- Engage and educate personnel on fishers by assigning staff (e.g., Enforcement, agency leadership) to be present at workshops to answer questions and by participating in conflict resolution training prior to the workshops to increase capacity to deal with outspoken/controversial fishers.
- Develop a human resources plan to help solve a potential lack of capacity and staff transitions/turnovers where new employees would need to be oriented on fisher registrations (e.g., training programs) with the involvement of the NOAA CRCP Fisheries Liaison.

#### **4. Spanish Translation:**

- Strengthen fisher level of understanding by providing Spanish translations for all materials, presentations, and facilitating an entire Spanish-language workshop session.

#### **5. Presentations:**

- Expand presentations to be more interactive and include important workshop topics that fishers would like to learn about, including fish ecology/sustainable fisheries 101, corals/reefs, and an enforcement panel including both local and Federal enforcement agencies.

#### **6. Fisher Registration:**

- Below are recommendations to improve the fisher registration process and to implement sustainable methods which can help support fisher compliance with rules and regulations. Streamline fisher registration process by performing work ahead of time on the phone (e.g.,



confirming name, address, number of helpers), setting up registration portion outside of the workshop room, and making registration information available to fishers earlier.

- Improve fisher compliance by implementing consistent licensing methods and tools on both islands, including placement of drop boxes in key locations, digital monitoring to timestamp and print receipts at catch report drop box sites and approving licensing through the same agencies on islands (e.g., making Department of Agriculture licensing requirements consistent).

#### 7. Evaluation Tool:

- Improve the workshop evaluation by shortening and simplifying the survey (e.g., yes/no or improve/no change/unsure questions, straightforward themes and instructions, and brief tables), piloting the survey with other fishers before the workshop and adapting revisions, having staff available to help fishers fill out the survey, and reporting results of the evaluation to fishers the following year.

### **Major Recommendations based on Long Term Objectives:**

Building on the long-term objectives (behavior and results) and partner feedback collected during the workshops, we highlight potential options for evaluating effectiveness of future workshops to improve fisher compliance.

- Interview fishers one-on-one to assess in-depth actions, barriers, and constraints to compliance.
- Develop consistent and uniform reporting system for all of USVI to ensure transparent and straightforward processes.
- Monitor fisher compliance regularly (e.g., catch report submissions) and create baseline information system to be able to analyze changes in compliance over time.
- Build a sense of community between enforcement agents and fishers to promote compliance and carry out steady communication to sustain cooperation.
- Promote and consistently enforce the compliance program through incentives and disciplinary actions.
- Incorporate other data into evaluation process to strengthen and build effectiveness.
- Consider use of web-based survey tools.

This report documents findings and results from the 2015 workshop evaluation. The most pressing next steps are to continue monitoring and evaluating effectiveness of future workshops to build on the baseline information collected and synthesized in this evaluation *report*. There are also very specific findings regarding, for example, how fishers would like to be communicated with, their perspectives on their experiences with various management and enforcement agencies and topics that they would like to learn more about. Uptake of suggested recommendations from this evaluation to improve future workshops, as well as incorporation of other data sources, can play a role in increasing capacity and improving fisher compliance success. Additional assessment and strategic thinking may be needed to determine the best approach for implementation of the suggested recommendations.