

Summary of Angler Focus Groups 2005 – 2007

Background.

Between August 2005 and May 2007, CDPH conducted a series of 14 focus groups. Focus groups were organized by members of the Local Stakeholder Advisory Group (LSAG) or other organizations serving the intended audience. Organizers recruited participants directly from the community of interest. Participants received stipends for their attendance. Each group was facilitated by a CDPH representative in English or Spanish, and translated into additional languages whenever necessary. For non-English or Spanish focus groups, the translator was chosen by the organizing party and given a stipend for his or her service. CDPH staff developed and used a discussion guide to facilitate focus groups; modifying it for each focus group to suit the purpose and audience. While the majority of the participants were anglers, some of the female participants ate sport fish but did not fish themselves.

Summary table.

Date	Ethnicity	Language	Number of Participants (% male)	Location	Organizer
8/4/05	Lao and Hmong	Lao	9 (100%)	Stockton	Lao Khmu Association, Inc.
8/11/05	Cambodian	Cambodian	10 (80%)	Stockton	United Cambodian Families
8/27/05	African American	English	8 (25%)	Stockton	EcoVillage Farm Learning Center
8/29/05	African American	English	21 (48%)	Richmond	EcoVillage Farm Learning Center
3/19/06	Mixed	English	14 (93%)	Los Gatos	Department of Fish and Game
4/6/06	Latino	Spanish	8 (75%)	Pittsburg	LULAC Todos Unidos
4/14/06	Hmong	Hmong	10 (100%)	Oroville	Hmong United Community of Oroville
6/1/06	Native American	English	10 (60%)	Oroville	Feather River Tribal Health
6/28/06	Russian	Russian	10 (100%)	Sacramento	Slavic Assistance Center
7/20/06	Vietnamese	Vietnamese	10 (80%)	Stockton	Vietnamese Voluntary Organization (VIVO)
8/10/06	African American (Boaters)	English	7 (71%)	Richmond	EcoVillage Farm Learning Center

4/14/07	Hmong	Hmong	16 (75%)	Fresno	California Amer-Asian Resource Education (CARE)
5/11/07	Hmong (9) and Cambodian (1)	Hmong	10 (100%)	Fresno	Fresno Center for New Americans
5/11/07	Hmong (8) and Cambodian (1)	Hmong and English	9 (0%)	Fresno	Fresno Center for New Americans
Total	14 focus groups		152 participants		

Purpose.

Focus groups provide qualitative information about beliefs and perceptions that groups can have about a particular topic. They are useful for obtaining a wide range of opinions, for explaining reasons people think or behave a certain way, and for providing details on the process people go through in making decisions. This type of information cannot easily be obtained through quantitative surveys. Focus groups can answer questions such as: “How do you deal with this issue?” or “What do you find confusing about x material?” However, they are **not** designed to answer questions like “What percentage of your community believes x?” or “How many people in general practice x behavior?”

Focus group results do not represent an entire community unless multiple focus groups have been conducted in a systematic way within the same community. To date, we have not had the opportunity to conduct multiple focus groups with many members of a single community, so these findings do not fully reflect the variation that can be found within cultural groups. Nevertheless, commonalities in attitudes, reactions, and behaviors could be found among participants, regardless of group affiliation. These common traits are useful for informing approaches that may be applicable across cultures and languages.

Each focus group conducted by CDPH staff had primary and secondary purposes. The groups that took place in the Delta (Stockton, Richmond, Pittsburg, Sacramento) were intended to identify fish species and fishing locations for a sampling plan for the Delta. The primary purpose of the 3/19/06 group was to obtain feedback from seasoned fishermen on wording and structure of advisory messages. The two groups that took place in Oroville were done as part of a larger needs assessment study in preparation for an upcoming advisory on the Feather River. The three Hmong focus groups provided feedback on radio public service announcements and Safe Eating Guidelines for the San Joaquin River.

The secondary purpose for all focus groups, regardless of location, was to assess attitudes and behaviors relating to fishing and fish eating. We asked all groups to discuss their perceptions of health advisories and educational strategies. Participants described the meaning of fishing and what factors impacted their fishing experiences. Whenever a group represented a distinct culture, we tried to determine ways their culture influenced their fishing activities and fish eating attitudes and behaviors. We

found that while there were differences of opinion within groups and differences in habits and preferences among distinct cultures, there were similarities among attitudes relating to fish advisories, education, and health, regardless of culture or language. This summary will focus primarily on the factors for which groups expressed greater agreement, with the understanding that there were still differences among groups regarding certain issues that should be explored further.

Fish species of importance.

For the Delta, striped bass was consistently mentioned by the Lao, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Latino anglers as one of the most, if not the most, important species for catching and eating. Other fish species named frequently were catfish, crappie, and bluegill. In the Vietnamese focus group, anglers thought that the fish species crappie was actually called “bluegill.” Using pictures, they indicated that they prefer eating crappie but they release other pan fish, such as bluegill and sunfish.

Fresno-based Hmong, who most often fished in reservoirs, also consistently mentioned striped bass as commonly eaten, along with crappie, bluegill, trout, and (black) bass.

The Russian anglers most commonly catch and consume catfish and carp.

Among the African American anglers, catfish and bluegill were identified as being the most important species, although striped bass and black bass are caught and consumed as well. Often, bluegill is referred to as “perch.” African Americans also named crappie, largemouth bass, and carp as species they consume.

In most groups, we found that sturgeon is considered a prized fish, although it is very seldom caught. Many participants indicated eating commercial sturgeon, but rarely self-caught sturgeon.

Reasons for fishing.

Anglers gave many reasons for fishing – most of them having to do with relaxation and recreation. Across cultures, when asked why they fish, anglers indicated that fishing was fun and relaxing, a good way to get away from the home environment and get outdoors, an opportunity to spend time with family, and a means of exercise. Some anglers felt that catching and eating fish was not a necessary component of a good fishing experience, but that catching fish – especially prized fish – made the experience more enjoyable. Most anglers indicated that they consume their catch.

In the Lao focus group, one angler mentioned that fishing was for food, not fun, and that sharing or selling fish with others was an important reason for fishing. In the same focus group, a younger angler emphasized that there are many other choices for food besides self-caught fish, implying that fishing was not an important source of food for his community. The two diverging attitudes may have been due to personality or generational differences.

The Cambodian focus group, also made of several older anglers, indicated that for them, fishing was for fun and exercise, and that self-caught fish is actually more “expensive” than store-bought fish (factoring time, equipment, and license fees). Vietnamese anglers enjoyed the recreational aspects of fishing but also expressed that self-caught fish was fresher and better than store-bought fish, so they preferred catching their own fish.

Among African American participants, recreation and being able to get away from city life were agreed to be important motivations for fishing. Catching fish was a demonstration of skill and made for a better fishing experience, and many African American participants clearly enjoyed eating the fish they caught. But there was no indication that fishing to supplement one’s diet was the main reason for going fishing.

Native American participants fished for tradition. In their focus group, they emphasized the importance of doing what their ancestors did. Participants mentioned having always fished since childhood and that fishing was a way to spend time with family.

Cleaning and Cooking practices.

Preparation practices differed by culture and fish, but no one preparation method was associated with any type of fish. The most universal agreement occurred within the African American focus groups, where most people named frying their fish as the most common preparation method in both groups. Upon probing, however, some of the younger participants indicated that grilling, microwaving, and baking were methods they used as healthier alternatives to frying. Older participants still favored frying.

Other methods of preparation included: grilling (often right away at the fishing location), broiling, baking, steaming, using in soups (including head and juices), and consuming raw (this was only mentioned by a few anglers).

Reaction to advisories.

Anglers, regardless of culture, exhibited strong feelings when discussing health advisories. Those anglers who had not heard the information before were highly concerned for their health. Anglers did not intuitively distinguish between contamination of fish and safety of the water for drinking or touching. **They were inclined to assume that if chemicals are in some of the fish, they are in all fish and also in the water.**

Furthermore, when told that some fish could be “safely” consumed in limited amounts such as once a week or once a month, some anglers indicated they would not consume those fish at all. They expressed a strong preference for knowing which fish they could safely consume without limit. Many were skeptical that different fish in the same water body could have different levels of chemicals, i.e., if one fish is contaminated, they must all be contaminated. Upon hearing about the health advisory for the Delta, a common reaction was to ask about other places they could go to catch cleaner fish.

A small minority of anglers stated that they would eat fish within consumption limits, that is, once or twice a month for striped bass from the Delta. It was unclear whether they understood that eating striped bass during a given month meant they should eat no other fish in the same month.

Most focus group participants were men and older women. Some men and women recognized that they were not among the most sensitive population and felt they did not need to worry about it. However, others were still concerned despite knowing that they were not the highest risk group. Some participants, such as one older man in the Latino focus group, felt “depressed” upon hearing the advisory.

Anglers expressed a range of opinions about whether they would continue fishing if they were not able to consume the fish they caught. Anglers who were familiar with the advisory but still continued to fish generally indicated that while they were glad to know the information, it didn’t stop them from fishing. In many cases, however, it did impact how much fish they kept or consumed. Many anglers wanted to continue fishing in “cleaner” waters. Very few participants said they would stop fishing altogether. Many anglers wanted to know where the contamination comes from, how to get rid of it, and what specific health effects it produces.

Venues for communicating advisory information.

All groups mentioned many of the same methods for communicating information to anglers. Word of mouth was mentioned by all groups as their most common or preferred way to find out information about fish and fishing conditions. Anglers asked for posted signs at fishing locations, bait shops, and license vendors. Newspaper and magazine articles were also recommended. Radio was recommended as a good way to reach the Hmong community.

Many groups mentioned community organizations (such as tribal councils, or the organization that was hosting the focus group) as good venues for promoting advisories, and some stated a preference for trusted community groups over local health agencies. Several participants suggested working more with youth in schools, on the premise that children effectively transfer information to their parents. The internet was either not mentioned or it was not considered a good source of information in any of the groups, since many do not use the internet or do not read English.

Reactions to the PSA among Hmong focus group participants was mixed, although women were generally more receptive to the PSA than men. The Hmong men felt the PSA lacked detail and raise many questions, and some Hmong men were skeptical about the motives of the PSA, i.e., it might be to prevent them from fishing.