



S-FFMC Menhaden Advisory Committee Minutes
Panama City Beach, Florida
Tuesday, March 15, 2022

Chairman **Moncrief** called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. with the following in attendance:

Members

Peter Himchak, Omega Protein, Tuckerton, NJ (via Go to Meeting)
Jason Adriance, LDWF, New Orleans, LA (via Go to Meeting)
Ray Mroch, NOAA Beaufort Lab, Beaufort, NC (via Go to Meeting)
Trevor Moncrief, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Scott Herbert, Daybrook Fisheries, New Orleans, LA
John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Francois Kuttel, Westbank Fishing, LLC, Empire, LA (via Go to Meeting)
Chris Swanson, FWC, St. Petersburg, FL
Carey Gelpi, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX (via Go to Meeting)

Others

Amy Schueller, NOAA Beaufort Lab, Beaufort, NC (via Go to Meeting)
Ed Swindell, Marine Process Services, Hammond, LA (via Go to Meeting)
Catherine Wilhelm, USM GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Bjorn Kwak, Daybrook Fisheries, New Orleans, LA
Shane Treadaway, Westbank Fishing, Empire, LA
Robert Leaf, USM GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
David Rosenthal, NOAA, Miami, FL (via Go to Meeting)
Sam McConnell
Jose Diaz, NOAA Southeast Fisheries Science Center, Miami, FL (via Go to Meeting)
Amanda Rezek, NOAA Beaufort Lab, Beaufort, NC (via Go to Meeting)
Bradley O'Bier, NOAA Beaufort Lab, Beaufort, NC (via Go to Meeting)

Staff

David Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Debbie McIntyre, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

Moncrief reviewed the agenda with the group. *On motion by **Mareska** and second by **Swanson**, the agenda was unanimously adopted.*

Approval of Minutes

The minutes from the last virtual meeting on October 5, 2021 were reviewed. **Mroch** moved to accept the minutes as written and with a second by **Mareska**, the minutes were approved.

Review of 2021 Gulf Menhaden Season and 2022 Forecast

Mroch presented the 2021 landings. The total landings were about 360,000 mt which was a decline of

12.9% compared to 2020 and 24% lower than the five-year average. There were six named tropical systems which contributed to low effort early and late in the season culminated with Hurricane Ida which impacted Louisiana in August and September. A total of 29 vessels fished in 2021 and 5 run boats were utilized to improve efficiency in transporting catches to the factories. The NOAA forecast for 2022 is 387,000 mt based on the fishing in 2021.

Update on Atlantic Menhaden Fishery

Mroch reported briefly on the Atlantic fishery as well. The key takeaways are that the TAC for reduction was reduced slightly to 194,000 mt coastwide in 2021 and the ASMFC is beginning its next assessment for Atlantic Menhaden.

Updated Indices of Abundance from Louisiana Fishery-Independent Sampling

Louisiana provided an update of their abundance indices (seine, gill net, and trawl) from their fishery-independent sampling. While there is some variability year to year, the trend is generally stable in all the indices since the mid-2000s. That report is available through the GSMFC.

Pre-Season Forecast Accuracy

Mroch has been collecting data and working on an analysis to improve the forecast. This has not been successful. **Mroch** will continue to look at the forecasting and see if there are any other ways to improve the predictions. The landings still fall within confidence intervals that were part of the forecast but that was the criticism from industry originally – it could be the best or worst season ever based on the intervals. **Moncrief** suggested that reporting a range might be more useful. The forecast is primarily for the industry to provide to investors and buyers. If we could narrow the range, it may be more appropriate than generating a point estimate guess. **Mroch** would like to talk further with **Moncrief** about options. Since the forecast is also based on the projected effort, perhaps the industry could provide **Mroch** more info about what vessels would participate in the coming season by March or April. **Herbert** said it would be helpful if industry could do something that is much more specific and with tighter confidence. **Mroch** has no way to do this right now with the current model as it is. **Kuttel** asked if maybe **Mroch** could go back in history and gather data estimate against harvest, go back as far as the data goes. A historical performance for the forecast could be generated and put on a new estimate.

Port Sample Acquisition and Processing in 2022

Mroch and **VanderKooy** briefly discussed how port sampling went in 2021 and noted that a call will be needed between the coordinators and industry before the season to be sure bailers collect the samples and the processors routinely collect them from the plants. The Port Samplers remain the same for 2022 but there will not be any in person training still due to NOAA travel restrictions. The electronic measuring boards will have to wait until later or maybe next season. It was noted that a decrease has been occurring in port sample numbers over the last couple of years. In addition, there were some questions raised about whether or not the run boats were just running catches or if they were actively fishing at times. This will be part of the discussion pre-season.

Marine Stewardship Certification of Gulf Menhaden Updates

Himchak stated that surveillance audit for Gulf Menhaden MSC Certification was completed and the team was happy with the progress on the potential harvest control rule (HCR). Now we need an internet-based data portal for some sort of composite index. National Science Foundation SEEMFIS has

funded a student in **Robert Leaf's** lab at GCRL. Catherine Wilhelm will be working with **Leaf** this coming year to develop an annual index in support of the HCR. Wilhelm will get to explore the entire management process for the reduction fishery and will be housed at the Omega Protein Moss Point facility.

NOAA Observer Steering Committee

Kuttel provided the results of the turtle observer pilot that the industry with which the industry was assisting. It was determined that drone observations did not work well nor did moving observers from the remote vessel to the steamer to view pumpouts. The camera systems on board did seem to identify targets which were deployed since no turtles were actually encountered during the tests. The system was able to identify the foam turtles that were randomly released into the net. Next year they will go into another trial project over the whole fishing season with one human observer onboard a vessel. Cameras are currently on boats from Empire and Abbeville.

Other Business

Louisiana will be releasing an RFP later this spring for a bycatch study of the reduction fleet in Louisiana. There are not many details but **Adriance** will forward the RFP when it is released.

VanderKooy reported that the Fall meeting may be our first one-per-year meeting. There will be no in-person meeting in March of 2023.

VanderKooy reminded all to turn their travel reimbursements to Ali Wilhelm.

Adjourn

With no further business to discuss, *on motion by **Herbert** second by **Mroch**, the meeting was adjourned at 12:08 p.m.*