

**S-FFMC MENHADEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES - 53rd Annual Spring Meeting
Tuesday, March 18, 2003
Point Clear, Alabama**

Joe Smith, by request of the Chairman, called the meeting to order at 8:41 a.m. with the following in attendance:

Members

Vince Guillory, LDWF, Bourg, LA
Rick Schillaci, Omega Protein, Inc., Moss Point, MS
Borden Wallace, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA
Joseph Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC
Steve Heath, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL

Staff

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Sallie Davis, Gulf Restoration Network, New Orleans, LA
Wendell Lorio, MSU, Stennis Space Center, MS
Anne Lange, NOAA, Silver Spring, MD

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was unanimously approved.

Approval of Minutes

B. Wallace moved to approve the minutes from 10/16/02 as written, **V. Guillory** seconded and the minutes were approved.

Membership Discussion

It was reported by **B. Wallace** that the Menhaden Advisory Council for the Gulf of Mexico had been dissolved by action of Omega Protein and that Toby Gascon would no longer be a member of the advisory committee reducing the number of seats from 9 to 8.

Forecast of 2003 Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Fishing Season

J. Smith provided his annual forecast for the upcoming season and review of the past season to the group. **Smith** reported that Dr. Mike Prager was the new team leader

for the population dynamics team at Beaufort. Two new PhD's have been hired to further fill the team.

In 2002, **Smith** had predicted a year with 493,000mt of menhaden would be landed in the Gulf. The actual landings were around 576,000mt, an increase of 10% over the previous year and steady around the five-year mean. July saw the highest catches since 1994 and September was the lowest since 1998. In spite of a cold wet, windy spring with high turbidity and high river discharge and a colder than normal May, the industry reported good catches in June and July. September saw five named tropical systems enter the Gulf of Mexico which contributed to the low landings in that month. In 2002, 40 regular steamers, 2 run boats, and 1 bait boat fished with effort estimated at 386,700 vessel/ton/weeks.

The age composition favored age-1's east of the River and age-2's west; a few age-3's were taken at Cameron and Moss Point. In 2003, it is anticipated that 39 steamers, 2 run boats, and 1 bait boat will operate at the 4 plants in the Gulf. This would mean roughly 375,000 vessel/ton/weeks for these vessels and a total landing of 512,000mt.

Smith further reported that Doug Vaughan is anticipating running the Gulf stock assessment along side the Atlantic stock assessment which is being conducted through the SEDAR process (Southeast Data Assessment and Review). This framework lengthens the time it takes for Vaughan to complete the assessment but he has determined that it should free some time to work up the Gulf. Vaughan hopes to present some Gulf results at our next meeting in Corpus Christi, Texas.

Louisiana 2003 Forecast

V. Guillory presented the Louisiana data modeling the 2003 forecast based on winter weather and recruitment. The 2002 January water temperatures were warmer than average, with a low Mississippi River discharge and associated rainfall resulting in higher than normal salinities around Grand Isle. Conditions would suggest the potential for lower recruitment in 2002. However, the LDWF juvenile abundance index is substantially higher than the long-term mean which is promising. Salinities have been average so far in 2003 and discharge is slowly increasing suggesting that oil yield may be good in 2003. A strong number of age-1's last year should result in a good showing of age-2's.

B. Wallace asked J. Smith to briefly discuss the Caenarvon River diversion and the apparent trend of more fish staying in the Sound longer as a result. **Smith** noted that Daybrook had historically left Bretton Sound by July but since the river diversion, fish remained all season in those waters. It appears that there are more fish east of the River in the last 10 years. This may provide a good biological argument for putting water back into the coastal marshes. It was also noted that after the Bonne Carre was opened in 1998, the 1999 fishing in Mississippi Sound was remarkable and the plants ran out of space for meal. **Smith** agreed to continue to investigate and watch this situation.

Revising CDFR Forms

J. Smith discussed the current format of the CDFRs and suggested a few improvements to the form which might make the data more useful to managers. With the existence of GPS on all the boats, he proposed adding actual latitude and longitude to the form to get much more precise location data than had been collected previously. **B. Wallace** suggested that the CDFRs could be incorporated into the Louisiana trip ticket format to eliminate the redundancy of multiple reporting forms. **Smith** agreed to talk to Joseph Shepard (LDWF) regarding the format and continue to work on this.

Atlantic Coast Update

J. Smith updated the group on the 2002 season on the Atlantic. Atlantic landings in 2002 were 174,068 mt. This was down 25% from the previous year on the Atlantic. Atlantic landings in 2002 were also down 19% from the previous 5-year average, but considerably fewer boats are fishing now than 5 years ago (12 regular steamers). The season is much more staggered on the Atlantic starting in the Chesapeake and moving north off New Jersey later. Chesapeake closed around Thanksgiving and the North Carolina fishery opened in September, was slow in October and picked up again from December to mid-January of 2003. Approximately 57% of the total Atlantic catch in 2002 came from Chesapeake Bay.

Other Business

S. VanderKooy updated the Committee on the Menhaden Website which is now accessible. The site has received a number of hits and several reporters and students have been directed to the site. The response has been very favorable.

VanderKooy updated the Committee on the continuation of the GSMFC initiative to key-enter the historic CDFRs. Temporary employees will be hired the first week of April and begin working on the 1984 dataset and end the effort with the 1991 dataset which, until recently, had been missing several vessels forms. This will make the complete CDFR set for the Gulf from 1984 to current available via computer.

It had been suggested at a previous meeting that Rocky Ward (TPWD) be invited to the fall meeting in Corpus Christi to present his genetics findings on regional menhaden populations. Staff will be sure that he is invited to present in October.

With no further business the meeting adjourned at 11:05 a.m.