



**S-FFMC MENHADEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
MINUTES - 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
Tuesday, October 14, 2003  
Corpus Christi, Texas**

Corky Perret, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m., with the following in attendance:

**Members**

Rick Schillaci, Omega Protein, Inc., Moss Point, MS  
Borden Wallace, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA  
Joseph Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC  
Corky Perret, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX  
Vince Guillory, LDWF, Bourg, LA

**Others**

Rocky Ward, TPWD, Palacios, TX  
Enric Cortes, NOAA Fisheries, Panama City, FL  
Doug Vaughan, NOAA Fisheries, Beaufort, NC  
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, VA  
Bobbi Walker, GMFMC, Orange Beach, AL  
Jill Jensen, Gulf Restoration Network, New Orleans, LA  
Mindy Ellmer, Austin, TX  
Frank Courtney, FFWCC, Port Manatee, FL  
Mike Ray, TPWD, Austin, TX  
Brandon Mobley, TPWD, Palacios, TX  
Andy Kemmerer, Brandon, MS  
Walter Blessey, GSMFC, Biloxi, MS

**Staff**

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

**Introductions and Membership Review**

**C. Perret** led the introductions of the MAC and the audience.

**Adoption of Agenda**

**C. Perret** indicated that under "Other Business" he would like to briefly update the MAC on the bycatch study of the menhaden fishery currently being conducted by the Mississippi DMR. **Toby Gascon**, Omega Protein, offered to update the group on his activities and some of the legislative work he has been involved with recently. **V. Guillory moved to accept the agenda. R. Schillaci seconded the motion, and with no opposition, the agenda was approved.**

### Approval of Minutes (March 18, 2003)

The minutes from the last meeting were reviewed. A typographical error was noted in second paragraph of the Louisiana 2003 forecast that the spelling of Caernarvon was incorrect and should include River behind it. In addition, the next line should include “**river diversion, fish remained...**”. The corrected minutes were accepted by unanimous consent.

### Status of 2003 Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Fishing Season

**J. Smith** provided his annual review of the fishing season. Oil yields were low in May but increased through June. The fleet enjoyed good catches for most of the season in 2003 with a few exceptions. Landings through September were 463,047 mt or 1,523 million std fish. This is down 12% from 2002 (527,231 mt) and down 11% from the previous five-year average of 51,649 mt. May, June, and August had the highest monthly landings with July being considerably lower due primarily to T.S. Bill and Hurricane Claudette which landed in Morgan City and Corpus Christi respectively. September was lower than expected in part due to T.S. Larry which churned for awhile in the southern Gulf and eventually made landfall in Mexico.

Four factories operated in the Gulf in 2003 with 42 vessels unloading menhaden for reduction, 39 regular steamers, and two run boats. One vessel operated for bait. The effort appears to be down 21% from the 2002 season and is down 27% from the previous five-year mean. With the vessels fishing until November 1, it is expected that total landings will approach 514,000 mt which is close to the 2003 forecast projected by NMFS at the March meeting (512,000 mt).

Assuming similar effort and vessels, it is forecasted that 2004 could see 510,000 mt of fish harvested.

### Atlantic Coast Update

**J. Smith** also updated the Committee on the east coast reduction fisheries. Atlantic Menhaden landings in 2003 through September 30 are estimated at 113,366 mt or 373 million std fish which was up 10% from 2002 (102,721 mt) and down 5% from previous five-year average of 119,299 mt. Vessel participation on the Atlantic includes 12 vessels for reduction so far in 2003, ten steamers at Reedville, Virginia and two steamers at Beaufort, North Carolina.

The Spawning Stock Biomass (SSB) through 2002 has been well above target and threshold values with fishing mortality (F) near target, but below threshold or limit; however, poor to moderate recruitment continues. Some of the actions on the Atlantic effecting the reduction fishery include New Jersey prohibiting purse-seining for reduction 0-3 miles in January of 2002, North Carolina suspends inside one mile prohibition on purse seining after January 15, 2003, and Virginia is petitioning to close the Rappahannock River to purse-seining.

### Update on Gulf Menhaden Stock Assessment

**Dr. Doug Vaughan**, NOAA Fisheries, presented preliminary results and explained some of the components going into the Gulf menhaden stock assessment which he has begun. **Vaughan** went through the forward projecting age structured model he is using in the assessment and explained his

data sources. Finally he presented some optional benchmarks for the Gulf using similar targets and thresholds as are currently used in the Atlantic.

Overall, his preliminary results indicate that the fishery remains strong with a static SPR approaching 70% depending on the model used. This is well above the threshold figure typically used by NMFS and the GMFMC of 20% to 30%. **Vaughan** hopes to continue finishing the assessment and will keep the MAC updated on his progress.

### **Gulf Menhaden Genetics**

**Brandon Mobley**, TPWD, presented an introduction to the genetics study being conducted by the TPWD to look at temporal and spatial genetic variations in the menhaden populations along the Texas coast. With both nuclear DNA and mitochondrial DNA, they are able to use PCR to determine overall variation in fish stocks. The nucleotide segments are then run across gels to identify specific microsatellites and determine inter- and intra-specific differences in menhaden stocks from each of the Texas systems. They have also compared their stocks with other stocks from the Gulf and a few locations on the Atlantic. Their techniques allow them to accurately identify between the four species of *Patronus*. TPWD is in the first year of their three year study.

### **Bycatch in the Gulf Menhaden Fishery**

**Dr. Enric Cortes** from the NMFS Panama City lab presented the LCS stock assessment specifically addressing the bycatch component from the menhaden fishery based on the data taken directly from deSilva and Condrey's 1994-1995 study. **Dr. Cortes** demonstrated that even with the addition of shark bycatch from several sources including the bottom long-line fishery, Mexican discards, and the Gulf menhaden purse-seine fishery, there was little or no effect on the outcome of the assessment. He assured the MAC that even at the 1994-1995 levels, no change in the current assessment was necessary.

Members of the MAC noted that blacktip stocks were rebuilding and no longer in an overfished status according to the latest assessment. **Dr. Cortes** did suggest that as a result of rebuilding, there was a chance the fishery could begin to encounter higher numbers of sharks in the future as other stocks rebuild. The MAC pointed out that with the advances in bycatch reduction efforts by the industry since the Condrey study, it should be a non-issue. It was believed by most of those in attendance that the presentation by Dr. Cortes should address the GMFMC's questions regarding this issue.

**C. Perret** also noted the bycatch study being conducted by the MS DMR. Their results to date indicate fairly low levels of bycatch by the fishery. The total catch of menhaden in the sets they have observed is around 2,700,000 menhaden and the total bycatch has included the following: 1380 sand seatrout, 1302 hardhead catfish, 607 jack crevasses, 19 blacktip sharks and an assortment of less numerous fish including bull sharks, spotted seatrout, redfish, and others.

### **Status of CDFR Data Entry Initiative**

**S. VanderKooy** updated the MAC on the status of the CDFR key-entry being conducted by the GSMFC to computerize the historical forms which are in jeopardy of being lost or thrown out. It

was agreed by VanderKooy and Smith that the GSMFC would work back to 1981 and end their efforts. To date most of the 1983 data has been entered which will give us continual data from 1983 to 2002. It was suggested that J. Shepard could be invited to present on the feasibility of converting the CDFRs to the LA trips ticket system to help reduce duplication of reporting by the industry. Staff will make the arrangements.

### **Election of Chairman**

**The chair rotates once again to the industry, and B. Wallace of Daybrook Fisheries was nominated and accepted as the next Chairman.**

### **Other Business**

**T. Gascon, Omega, discussed some of the activities he has been involved with. It was reported that both Daybrook and Omega would reinstitute the Menhaden Advisory Council for the Gulf of Mexico which Gascon had previously served as Executive Director. It was moved that the MAC reinstate the Executive Director as a voting member on the Committee and passed unanimously.** Finally, some minor changes were noted on the membership roster with R. Schillaci becoming the Omega representative in place of Barney White and T. Gascon as his alternate. It was also suggested that the GMFMC be added to the "others" list for mail-outs to be sure that the Council was aware of future MAC activities and correspondence.

***With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:35 a.m.***