

**S-FFMC MENHADEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES – 54th Spring Meeting
Monday, March 15, 2004
New Orleans, Louisiana**

B. Wallace, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m. with the following in attendance:

Members

Rick Schillaci, Omega Protein, Inc., Moss Point, MS
Borden Wallace, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA
Ed Swindell, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA
Joseph Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC
Doug Vaughan, NMFS, Beaufort, NC
Kevin Anson, AMRD/ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL (*Proxy for Vernon Minton*)
Toby Gascon, Omega Protein, Inc., Baton Rouge, LA
Corky Perret, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX
Vince Guillory, LDWF, Bourg, LA

Staff

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

Others

Tom Wittmann, Omega Protein, Inc., Abbeville, LA
Joey Shepard, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, VA
Nancy Thompson, NMFS/SEFSC, Miami, FL

Introductions and Membership Review

B. Wallace led the introductions of the MAC and the audience.

Adoption of Agenda

C. Perret moved to adopt the agenda as written, **R. Schillaci** seconded the motion, and with no opposition, the agenda was adopted.

Approval of Minutes (October 14, 2003)

The minutes from the last meeting were reviewed. **R. Schillaci** moved to accept the minutes as written. **J. Mambretti** seconded the motion and the minutes were approved.

Forecast for 2004 Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Fishing Season

J. Smith reported that landings of Gulf menhaden in 2003 were 517,079 mt or 1,701 million standard fish which was down 10% from 2002 (574,530 mt) and down 9% from previous 5-yr average of 569,136 mt. The highest landings in 2003 occurred in May and June at 101,000 mt each. July experienced the lowest landings since 1996 at 68,500 mt mainly due to inclement weather. Landings in the "extended season" were 54,600 mt which was higher than the 10-yr mean (1993-2002) of 50,958 mt.

April saw good catches during the first week of the season with the prices for meal and oil starting off strong. May and June saw good catches but low oil yields from near drought conditions in the western Gulf. Drought turned to monsoon in parts of the western Gulf in the end of June and fish oil yields improved with the western ports setting near record landings for plant-weeks. July landings fell substantially due to holidays and two tropical systems. August weather and catches were good with the exception of mid-month when T.S. Erika made its way into the Brownsville area. Windy weather and T.S. Larry in mid-September resulted in an ending to the 2003 season.

Vessel participation in 2003 included 42 vessels (39 regular steamers, 2 run boats, and one bait boat), which was similar to 2002. Nominal fishing effort in 2003 was 363,200 vessel ton weeks; the lowest since 1965 which was down 6% from 2002 and down 10% from previous 5-yr mean (405,700 vtwks).

It should be noted that the 2003 landings were 1% greater than March '03 forecast provided by **J. Smith** at the NMFS in Beaufort.

In 2004 **Smith** predicts that there should be 4 factories operating in the Gulf with 43 vessels [40 steamers, 2 run boats, and 1 bait boat] at 385,000 vtwks of nominal effort. With those values, it is estimated that the landings in 2004 should be around 515,000 mt.

Louisiana Forecast

V. Guillory provided Louisiana's annual forecast based on environmental data, recruitment, and previous years juvenile abundance indices. Based on low average water temps in January 2003, high river discharge, low rainfall, and lower salinities in early 2003, and average juvenile abundances overall in 2003, the forecast for Louisiana waters is between 387,000 and 439,000 mt.

Gulf Menhaden Stock Assessment

D. Vaughan provided the current assessment for Gulf menhaden. Using information on growth, reproduction, natural mortality, fishery landings, and fishery-independent surveys, Vaughan estimated age-specific fishing mortality and population abundances of Gulf menhaden between 1964-2002. In addition, he proposed benchmarks (targets and limits) to determine stock status in the future.

Regardless of the model Vaughan used, estimates of fishing mortality have generally decreased over the assessment period, while estimates of reproductive success have generally increased (measured as spawning stock biomass or population fecundity). Estimates of the terminal (2002) population fecundity are well above target, suggesting that the stock is healthy (not overfished). Meanwhile, estimates of the terminal fishing mortality are between the target and limit benchmarks, suggesting that the stock is not overfished nor is overfishing occurring. SPR for the Gulf menhaden stock is around 60%, which is nearly double the target SPR for most federally managed species. It is believed that the next assessment, scheduled for 2008/2009, will likely be completed through the SEDAR process.

CDFR/LA Trip Ticket Forms

A short discussion ended the debate over combining the CDFR with the LA menhaden trip ticket. It is not likely that the CDFR can be incorporated into the trip ticket format to prevent duplication. **J. Smith** would like to continue modifying the CDFR however to include more useful data fields considering today's navigational technology. **Smith** will develop a working form to field test this summer.

Status of CDFR Data Entry Initiative

S. VanderKooy reported on the work that is nearing completion to computerize historical CDFRs from NOAA. At this time, all the forms from 1983 to present are entered and the Commission plans to enter 1982 as the terminal year for this effort. Forms continue to 1979 but the quality and completeness of the data is questionable. **It was moved and passed by the MAC that the Commission would scan the remaining forms to preserve them electronically in the event they should be key entered in the future.** Staff would complete this effort this summer.

Other Business

It was suggested by **J. Rester** that the MAC might want to watch the situation with proposed LNG (Liquid Natural Gas) plants in the region. Intakes for water are being discussed in the estuaries and passes that would cause serious impingement problems for eggs and larvae of many critical estuarine species. It was suggested that Rester continue to monitor the status of the proposed plants and report to the MAC in the fall.

C. Perret brought to the MACs attention the proposed reservoirs on the Pearl River around Jackson, Mississippi. The concern regarding freshwater flow to the Gulf was highlighted. It seems that a lot of support for the project exists away from the Gulf. It was recommended that J. Rester continue to monitor the projects and report to the MAC as it proceeds.

With no further business, the MAC adjourned at 3:23 p.m.