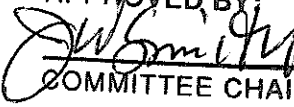


**S-FFMC MENHADEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES – 56th Annual Spring Meeting
Tuesday, March 14, 2006
San Antonio, Texas**

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

S. VanderKooy called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m. on behalf of Chairman **Smith** who was participating via teleconference, with the following in attendance:

Members

Toby Gascon, Omega Protein, Inc., Baton Rouge, LA
Borden Wallace, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA
Rick Schillachi, Omega Protein, Inc., Moss Point, MS
Vince Guillory, LDWF, Bourg, LA
Vernon Minton, AMRD/ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Corky Perret, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX

Joe Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC – *via teleconference*

Others

John Roussel, *GSMFC Commissioner*, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA
Ben Landry, Omega Protein, Inc., Baton Rouge, LA
Roy Crabtree, NOAA – SERO, St Petersburg, FL

Staff

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

Introductions

VanderKooy led the introductions of the MAC for **Smith**.

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was reviewed and **B. Wallace** moved to approve the agenda seconded by **R. Schillachi** and the agenda was approved.

Approval of Minutes (10/18/05)

The minutes from the October meeting were reviewed and **V. Minton** moved to approve, **C. Perret** seconded and the minutes were accepted as written.

Forecast for 2006 Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Fishing Season

Smith reported that landings in 2005 were down 7% mainly due to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. All the plants were hit hard and several boats were impacted. The season started out relatively strong with good landings in May and June. Weather in July resulted in a slight decrease in landings with August looking good until the end of the month. September and October landings fell off significantly with almost no menhaden being landed for the first several weeks after the storms until Moss Point and Abbeville reopened in mid-October with limited production. The factories at Empire and Cameron remained closed for the rest of the season. A total of 43 vessels operated in the Gulf in 2005, 40 regular steamers, 2 run boats, and 1 bait boat. The ages of the 2005 catch saw 1-year olds at Cameron, 2-year olds at Abbeville, and a split between 1s and 2s at Empire and Moss Point suggesting that the 2004 year class which was strong should yield more 2s next season. Based on limited information for effort next year, number of plants, and number of boats, the forecast for the 2006 landings is estimated to be around 459,000mt and 350,000 vessel/ton/wks. Again, if the 2004 year class shows up strong in the landings in 2006 the catch could be higher.

Status of Recent NMFS Gulf Menhaden Stock Assessment

Smith also briefly updated the committee on the final results of the recent NMFS stock assessment for Gulf menhaden. The assessment was held up an extra year to include the 2004 data in the analysis. The model used is the same as the one used on the Atlantic which consists of forward projections and includes targets and limits for both fishing mortality and fecundity. The results including the 2004 data indicate that the stock while not overfished should be watched as mortality appears to be increasing slightly and fecundity is decreasing slightly yet not exceeding either limit. This in no way indicates a problem in the fishery only annual variation between landings and recruitment. Data from the 2005 storm season and reduced effort in 2006 should skew the data back toward both targets. There was considerable discussion regarding the model and the reasons for switching from the old VPA type model used prior. Questions were raised regarding the model and it was asked if the Population Dynamics team could revisit the same data set using the VPA model. Two items were identified specifically as being in need of update which could improve the stock assessments using either technique; the index of recruitment currently being provided by the states, and the fecundity and maturity schedule estimates which dated back to the late 1960s and late 1980s. In addition, the SERSC would have to redirect Vaughan and his cohorts to devote time to Gulf menhaden since they are currently locked up with the SEDAR process for reef fish.

After much debate B. Wallace moved that the MAC to recommend to the SFFMC to seek to fund the proper gear and sampling protocols to improve the estimates of juvenile abundance and recruitment for Gulf menhaden at the state level and to seek to fund a study which would update the Lewis and Roithmyer (1981) fecundity estimates for Gulf menhaden for the purpose of stock assessment. In addition, the MAC recommends to the SFFMC that a recommendation should be made to the SEFSC and Dr Nancy Thompson to continue with the VPA analysis of Gulf

menhaden until such time as the forward projection model has been sufficiently reviewed and compared with the previous methodology. V. Guillory seconded and the motion passed.

Update on Atlantic Menhaden

Smith gave a brief update on the Atlantic as well in 2005. The total landings were around 147,000 mt which was 18% less than in 2004. However, this could be directly attributed to the factory in Beaufort, NC not operating last year. While weather was a factor early in the season and late, catches were average for the year through August. Hurricane Ophelia in September and Wilma in late October had minor effects on fishing effort. Poor weather conditions during November and December tended to keep the fleet near the mouth of the Bay; little fishing occur off North Carolina in fall. The forecast for 2006 on the Atlantic is for landings around 176,000 mt.

Smith also provided an update to the activities on the Atlantic regarding the ASMFC and regulatory actions in the reduction fishery. The Atlantic Menhaden Management Board met in February 05 and approved the development of Addendum II to Amendment 1 of the Atlantic Menhaden FMP due to concerns of localized depletion of forage base and the Chesapeake Bay menhaden population. It was ultimately decided to impose a 105.8mt cap on reduction landings despite protest and alternatives offered by industry. In August 2005, the cap carried and since then there has been debate over how to monitor and manage the cap. In November, Virginia's Attorney General pronounced that Virginia did not have to follow the established cap citing procedural problems on the part of the ASMFC in imposing the cap. Now the question is whether Virginia will be found "out-of-compliance" by the AMMB and the issue may be sent to the Secretary of Commerce for consideration.

Louisiana Forecast

V. Guillory provided the LDWF's annual forecast for Louisiana waters. Guillory agreed with Smith's assessment of the 2004 year class and suggested that this may be a good year for age 2 menhaden in the Louisiana catch. Guillory reported that the 2004-2005 winter was above average for temperature and rainfall, but was below average on salinity and river discharge which typically indicates a poor recruitment year. However, despite the environmental assessment, the juvenile menhaden indices were above average indicating a good age-1 year class in 2006 as well. Based on the 2004 fishing effort, discounting the 2005 storm season, the landings are forecasted to be around 430,000mt in Louisiana.

Reduction Fishery Post-Hurricane Status; 2006 Projections

The MAC discussed the rebuilding and future plans for the industry following the storms of 2005. Both the Omega and Daybrook representatives indicated that at this time there was no plan to move any vessels outside of the Gulf. Daybrook was hardest hit with its

Empire facility completely flooded. Two of its steamer vessels ended up on the highway after Katrina but have since been put back in the water.

Omega anticipates that Cameron will be the only facility that won't open right away at the start of the season. They noted that a lot of the shoreside infrastructure is virtually gone and a lot of Omega's losses were uninsured losses. Employees were displaced following the storm and there is some concern that people are not getting back into the fishery since construction and hurricane related jobs pay a lot more than the reduction industry right now. It is likely that a few additional run boats will be used from Moss Point to make up for the Abbeville plant being closed.

It is a difficult time for everyone in the reduction fishery but with help, the industry can return.

Other Business

Smith noted that the new CDFR forms seemed to be working very well and the captains have been very good at filling out the GPS coordinates. The 2006 forms have been printed and Smith will provide those whenever the industry is ready for them.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:40 am.