

APPROVED BY:

J. W. Smith
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**S-FFMC MENHADEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES – 56th Annual Meeting
Tuesday, October 18, 2005
Lake Buena Vista, Florida**

J. Smith, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 8:32 a.m., with the following in attendance:

Members

Toby Gascon, Omega Protein, Inc.,
Vernon Minton, AMRD/ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL
Joseph Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC
Corky Perret, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX
John Roussel, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA

Others

Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD
John Hocevar, Greenpeace, Austin, TX
Ralf Riedel, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
David Medici, Gulf & South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, Tampa, FL
Bob Garaway, FWS Federal Aid, Atlanta, GA
Leroy Kiffe, Lockport, LA
Butch Gautreaux, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Morgan City, LA
Robert Adami, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX
Joe Gill, Jr., *GSMFC Commissioner*, Ocean Springs, MS

Staff

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, SM/Habitat Program Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Dave Donaldson, FIN Program Manager, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Introductions and Membership Review

J. Smith led the introductions of the MAC and the audience.

Adoption of Agenda

C. Perret moved to accept the agenda as written, J. Mambretti seconded the motion, and with no opposition, the agenda was approved.

Approval of Minutes (March 15, 2005)

The minutes from the last meeting were reviewed. **C. Perret** moved to accept the minutes as written, **J. Mambretti** seconded and the minutes were approved.

Status of 2005 Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Fishing Season

J. Smith of the Beaufort NOAA Laboratory offered a quick overview of the 2005 season to date. The 2005 fishing season had been impacted by a high amount of tropical activity which included TS Arlene and TS Cindy in June, Hurricanes Dennis and Emily in July, Hurricane Katrina in August, and Hurricane Rita in September. Although effort was probably down, the catch prior to Katrina was good with August being a peak month for landings. **Smith** estimates the landings currently around 410,000 MT and with two plants returning to limited operation in October, final landings may reach 423,000 MT which would be down 10% from last year and down 21% from the 5-yr average.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated the industry this season. Moss Point and Empire were flooded and suffered extensive wind damage, while Cameron and Abbeville both took substantial losses from Rita. A number of boats in the Gulf fleet were damaged or pushed onto land, but many have been refloated and should be able to continue to fish. Plants, however, may not have fair^{ed} as well as the vessels. Moss Point and Abbeville were patched up and back on-line by October 10th. Cameron may be a total loss. Daybrook's plant at Empire sustained severe damage, but the company is striving to be back in operation in 2006. The two operating plants, Moss Point and Abbeville, may not run for long due to the saltwater which inundated all the equipment.

2006 Fishing Season Forecast

J. Smith could not give a forecast for next year, not knowing the number of vessels or plants that might return for the 2006 fishery.

Atlantic Coast Update

J. Smith also updated the committee on the activities in the Atlantic. As of September 30, 115,556 metric tons or 380 million standard fish have been landed on the Atlantic, which is down 8% from 2004, and down 1% from the 5-yr average. **Smith** mentioned a few noteworthy items from the 2005 Atlantic season. Beaufort Fisheries did not operate during 2005 and probably will not fish during '05 fall fishery. This past summer, adult Atlantic menhaden occurred coastally north to Casco Bay, Maine. In addition, this was the first time since summer 1993 that fish were caught in pound nets all the way up to Gloucester, Mass. **Smith** noted good signs of 'peanut' menhaden in Virginia and farther north.

Finally, **Smith** mentioned that Greenpeace helicopters and boats 'buzzed' Virginia menhaden boats prior to Atlantic Menhaden Management Board meeting in August. The Atlantic Menhaden Management Board discussed several options for 'capping' the catch

of menhaden in Chesapeake Bay for reduction. The Board eventually voted to cap removals from the Bay at recent 5-yr mean (~105,800 MT, 2000-04) and passed the proposal 12-2; this would be for reduction catches only, not bait.

Modifications to CDFR Forms

J. Smith reported that the new CDFR forms were used in the Atlantic and Gulf menhaden fisheries this year, and that the captains seemed to be receptive, although there are still a few technical errors which should be eliminated with time. The new forms incorporate GPS locations as well as eliminate some of the less used data fields which were not always reliable. In addition, the forms were structured such that scanning technology may be able to be used in the future, rather than hand key-entry, speeding up the reporting process.

The Gulf Menhaden Stock Assessment

J. Smith briefed the committee on the Beaufort Lab's final assessment for the Gulf menhaden stock. The new assessment uses data through 2004 and proposes biological reference points for management of the stock. This proposed scenario is similar to the current management scheme for Atlantic menhaden using target and limit benchmarks based on per-recruit analysis for gulf menhaden. The model estimates spawner-recruit relationship, fishery selectivities, annual fishing mortality rate, and population fecundity; the assessment produced a base model run assuming best estimates of biological parameters and the Beverton-Holt relationship between eggs and recruits.

The results indicate that fishing mortality rates, F , were highly variable pre-1990. Fishing mortality estimates have been lower and less variable since 1991, possibly due to fleet reductions. Recently, F has increased from 0.45 in 2001 to 0.98 in 2004. Population fecundity has also varied with estimates lowest in the 1960s, relatively stable in 70s and 80s, generally increasing in 1990s, and decreasing since 2000. Recently, the number of recruits has varied around a declining trend: 482 billion in 1998 to 199 billion in 2004. A peak in the number of recruits typically occurs 2 years prior to the peak in estimated ova production. **Smith** reported that the bottom line from the assessment is that the estimated fishing mortality in the terminal year 2004, was between the target and limit, indicating that fishing mortality is high, but not to the point of "overfishing." Similarly, estimated fecundity in the terminal year 2004, was between the target and the limit, indicating that the stock is below healthy levels, but not depleted.

State and Industry Reports on Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and Their Effects on Fishing

The states and industry reported on the status of the agencies and plants/vessels since the hurricanes.

Texas – Hurricane Rita caused some substantial problems in the eastern part of the state. **J. Mambretti** reported that there were fish kills from Galveston to the east due to low

DO which did kill some menhaden. Lots of upland terrestrial habitat was inundated with saltwater and will likely result in vegetation loss and brown kills. The barrier islands and dunes were severely impacted all the way to Matagorda Bay from the surge. Finally, all the local fisheries in the impact area were and will be affected from the storm and include the loss of boat ramps, piers, docks, fish houses, and bait houses.

Louisiana – **J. Roussel** reported that what wasn't damaged or destroyed from Katrina was by Rita, the entire coast of Louisiana was impacted in some way by one or both storms. Katrina hit the coast from Grand Isle to Mississippi, and Rita hit the western coast, but drove water into the central coast. The LDWF had numerous reports of fish kills, but very little confirmation or data on fish numbers due to the extensive damage and difficulty in mobilizing staff at that time. Many of the fish impacted were left on land after the surge went back out making it even more difficult to quantify. In Breton and Chandeleur sounds, all the fishing communities are pretty much gone and debris in the water impacts the ability to fish in those areas. Most of the communities south of New Orleans to Venice are completely gone including Empire and the Daybrook menhaden plant. LDWF anticipates extensive damage to its oyster fishery, as well due to overburden and low DOs. **Roussel** reported that the infrastructure would be the hardest to restore since much of the eastern and western Louisiana coastal communities are virtually gone.

Mississippi – **C. Perret** reported that there were no deaths of MDMR staff from the storms, but that 20% of the staff had lost homes and the MDMR building had water to the second floor. The MDMR lost 20+ vehicles and currently had staff working in some temporary trailers with limited phone service. **Perret** noted that the biggest problem during and after the hurricane was communication and recommended that all the states look into the technology that the military used during the disaster. **Perret** reported that recreational fishing was beginning to pick up, but that many of the natural and artificial reefs would need to be remapped. The oyster reefs in Mississippi appear to have been scoured and may have moved substantially. There were reports of fish kills and will likely be marsh and upland habitat problems due to the inundation of saltwater far up the coast. MDMR staff helped to identify debris in the Mississippi ports using side scan sonar and allowed the Army Corp to reopen those ports after the storm. **Perret** indicated that his biggest concern was getting the information out that Gulf seafood is safe; all the monitoring and testing has indicated no toxicity in seafood products as a result of the storm. He would like to see that information get into the press as quickly as possible. **Perret** reported that Mississippi's governor is soliciting plans for the rebuilding of the coast communities and there have been proposals to develop 'seafood parks' to reestablish the infrastructure for commercial fishing, house processors, and distance them far enough from the impacted coastline to protect them in the event of another disaster. Mississippi would likely be extending the menhaden season an additional two weeks to help the industry following the disaster. **T. Gascon** offered the use of the Moss Point plant and the mothballed Morgan City plant to the states as temporary infrastructure and to keep Omega employees working.

Alabama – **V. Minton** reported that storm surge on Dauphin Island and in the Bayou LaBatre area was around 18 feet. Approximately 200 homes were destroyed on Dauphin Island. The AMRD was able to start removing debris immediately using contractors that were still working from the Hurricane Ivan cleanup of the 2004 season. Bayou LaBatre, formerly the tenth port in the nation in terms of fisheries landings, was heavily damaged by the storm surge. The large processors sustained major damage and most of the small processors were completely wiped out by the storm. **Minton** reported that they had received considerable help from their legislature already. Initially, the oyster reefs were closed to harvest as water quality and tissue testing was going on, but everything has come back negative; Alabama oysters and consequently, Alabama fish is safe to eat. Prices for shucked oysters are currently around \$9/lb or \$75/gallon as a result, unfortunately there are very few shucking houses left, and those that have reopened are having trouble getting laborers since FEMA is paying more right now for recovery efforts. **Minton** reported that while the charter fleet did not suffer major damage, there is no infrastructure for customers coming into the area. AMRD reports good numbers of shrimp, but the debris issue is hindering harvest. **J. Roussel** suggested that there needs to be better coordination between state health officials and the feds to communicate fisheries info and seafood safety to the public since the storm. The public perception is that Gulf fisheries are unsafe.

Omega – **T. Gascon** reported that while Omega suffered no deaths of employees resulting from either Hurricane Katrina or Rita, their plants had suffered extensive damages. Katrina only impacted the Moss Point plant and although they had restored limited operations, the plant was only at 16% of capacity. The few pumps and machinery that are currently working had been inundated with saltwater and would likely fail soon. Rita wiped out all of Cameron which was a total loss and Abbeville was completely flooded. Essentially 76% of the reduction fishery for the country was lost as a result of the two storms. Currently, Omega has 11 functional boats in Abbeville and 4 in Moss Point. When the boats can get out to fish, nets are being damaged due to debris in the water, so fishing for the remainder of the season looks poor at this time. **Gascon** reported that Omega's Morgan City plant had been mothballed several years ago but was undamaged by either storm and had been offered as a temporary location for Daybrook Fisheries although **B. Wallace** had not yet determined what course of action they would take. The Daybrook plant in Empire had been condemned and would have to be rebuilt. Omega was in the process of requesting additional assistance from Congress and NMFS noting that a prolonged absence of the reduction fishery from the market place nationally and internationally could result in a loss of that market share in the future.

LNG Facilities in the Gulf

J. Rester updated the committee on the proposed LNG facilities in the Gulf and where they were in the licensing process. Compass Port, located 11 miles south of Dauphin Island had a public comment period earlier in the year ending on March 27, 2005. On May 9, 2005, the processing of the license application was suspended until more information was received, analyzed, and incorporated into the Final EIS and it is expected that the Final EIS should be out before the end of October 2005. The proposed

Pearl Crossing Deepwater Port would be located 41 miles south of Cameron, Louisiana in 62 feet of water and utilize an open loop system using 195 million gallons of water per day on average. The public comment on the Draft EIS closed on June 7, 2005 and on July 14, 2005, the processing of the license application was suspended until more information is received, analyzed, and incorporated into the Final EIS.

The proposed Main Pass Deepwater Port, located 16 miles southeast of Louisiana had just completed its public comment on the Draft EIS which closed on August 1, 2005. On August 26, 2005, processing of the license application was suspended until more information is received, analyzed, and incorporated into the Final EIS. Finally, the proposed Beacon Port Deepwater Port, located approximately 50 miles east-southeast of Galveston had submitted a request for public scoping comments and closed the comment period on July 11, 2005. On July 14, 2005, processing of the license application was suspended until more information is received, analyzed, and determined to be complete. Draft EIS should be out some time later this year or early next year.

Rester also reported on additional developments with the LNG issue. In the language of the Deepwater Port Act, the governor of the states adjacent to a state which connects a pipeline to a deepwater port must be solicited for approval of LNG deepwater port. In other words, the Governor of an adjacent coastal state has the power to veto a LNG deepwater port. This past summer, the governors of Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi sent letters to MARAD stating that they would oppose and veto the licensing of any offshore LNG terminals that would use the open rack vaporizer system. **Rester** promised to keep the committee informed as more information was made available.

Election of Chair

The MAC re-elected J. Smith to serve as chairman in lieu of recent events and the losses to the industry.

Other Business

With no further business, the MAC adjourned at 11:40 a.m.