


**S-FFMC MENHADEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
MINUTES – 57<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
Monday, October 23, 2006  
New Orleans, LA**

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**J. Smith** called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m. with the following in attendance:

**Members**

Toby Gascon, Omega Protein, Inc., Baton Rouge, LA  
Borden Wallace, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA  
Rick Schillaci, Omega Protein, Inc., Moss Point, MS  
Ed Swindell, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA  
Keith Ibos (*proxy for Vince Guillory*), LDWF, Bourg, LA  
Stevens Heath, AMRD/ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL  
Corky Perret, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX  
Joe Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC  
Doug Vaughan, NMFS, Beaufort, NC – *via teleconference*

**Others**

Kyle Shertzer, NMFS Beaufort, NC - *via teleconference*  
Ben Landry, Omega Protein, Inc., Baton Rouge, LA  
Richard Fulford, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
Aaron Viles, Gulf Restoration Network, New Orleans, LA  
Glen Sutton, TPWD, Dickinson, TX

**Staff**

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

**Introductions**

**Smith** led the introductions of the MAC and explained that while **D. Vaughan** had intended to be at the meeting, travel restrictions within NMFS prevented him from attending. He would be available via teleconference for any questions related to the stock assessment.

**Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was reviewed and without objection, the agenda was approved.

### Approval of Minutes (3/14/06)

*The minutes from the March meeting were reviewed and B. Wallace moved to approve, R. Schillaci seconded and the minutes were accepted.*

### Status of 2006 Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Fishing Season

**J. Smith** reviewed the 2006 season. He reported that at this time, the 2006 landings were at 440,000MT which is up 7% from the same period last year but still 4% below the 5-yr mean. While all the factories sustained heavy damage from the two hurricanes in 2005, all 4 were in operation by June of 2006 and processed fish at almost the 2005, pre-storm levels. After a near drought following the storms until early summer, landings were fair but fishing was hampered by windy and wet weather which greatly reduced the ability to spot menhaden mid to late summer. In addition, a very dry winter resulted in low oil yields during most of 2006. It is estimated that under current fishing, the season should end around 490,000MT.

**Smith** reported that the 2005 year class appears to have been relatively strong as age-1 fish in the catch this year; anecdotal reports suggest that there are large numbers of 'peanut' menhaden (age-0's) in the nearshore waters of the Gulf as the menhaden season comes to an end in October. Coast-wide, abundance of age-1s are nearly equal to the age-2s. A total of 41 boats fished for reduction in 2006, 38 steamers, 2 run boats, and 1 bait boat. Nominal effort was down 4-5% in 2006 from recent years. The forecast in March was for landings to reach 459,000MT and is roughly 7% below the projected final total.

**Smith** also provided a preliminary forecast for 2007 per the industry's request. Based on 2006 numbers of vessels and effort, Smith projects the landings could be around 467,000MT but the March forecast will be more precise with the completed 2006 totals.

Industry reported that many of their boats had experienced down time due, in part, to storm debris problems. There were many incidents of vessels sustaining damage in shallow waters and in channels. With fewer shipyards to make repairs, the effort was likely lower than normal. In addition, the rookie crews may have contributed to breakdowns as they were less seasoned than the crews who may have left the area after the storm. A lot of factors seem to be contributing this year.

### Atlantic Coast Update

**Smith** provided an update on the Atlantic menhaden season and management. Landings through September were down 7% from 2005 and down 10% from the 5-yr mean. Omega Reedville was the only plant in operation with 11 vessels, although there were 10-11 bait boats in Virginia, New Jersey, and New England. Historically, bait made up 10% of the total menhaden catch however in recent years it has made up 15-17% of the total. There were reports of lots of menhaden in the New England states as well as south from Beaufort to Florida which presumes that as the coastal population increases, they are expanding both north and south. Finally, it appears that 2003, 2004, and 2005 have been years with good recruitment of Atlantic menhaden.

**Smith** also reported on the ASMFC activities and focused specifically on the Virginia issue of 'non-compliance' with Addendum II. After much positioning and posturing, the state of Virginia and Omega Protein reached a compromise on the 'Chesapeake Bay cap' (105,800MT) , that is, menhaden for reduction removals from the Bay. The governor of Virginia offered a compromise in August of 109,000MT, effective 2006 through 2010, for the reduction fishery, with overages subtracted from the next year, and underages credited to the next year up to 122,000MT. In addition, Omega Protein, Inc. would cooperate with researchers to study issues of localized depletion and relative abundance. The governor of Maryland agreed with the compromise cap, along with several NGOs and other recreational fishing groups. Final approval of the compromise cap by the Atlantic Menhaden Management Board is expected on October 25.

### **Gulf Menhaden Stock Assessment**

**D. Vaughan** was unable to attend the meeting to deliver his Gulf menhaden stock assessment but **Smith** presented it to the MAC with **Vaughan** on conference call to answer any questions. Overall the assessment looked good with results indicating there was no overfishing of Gulf menhaden. The biological reference points used on the Atlantic were applied to the Gulf setting targets and limits to both fishing mortality and population fecundity. Several runs of the model were completed varying certain parameters in an effort to tune the model. The final results indicate that since 2001 fishing mortality has increased slightly, population fecundity has declined slightly, and the # of recruits may be declining since 1998. The bottom line is that the fishery is operating well within the limits and only slightly above the targets through 2004; the stock is not overfished nor is overfishing occurring. With reduced effort in 2005 and 2006 due hurricanes Katrina and Rita and good recruitment in those years, recent year benchmarks should continue towards or below the targets as fishing mortality decreases and fecundity presumably increases.

**Vaughan** provided a short exercise comparing the VPA model with the Statistical Catch at Age model. In general, the new catch at age model is much better at determining all the necessary variables and is more statistically sound than the old VPA model. It provided better estimates of recruitment to age-1 and total stock biomass.

### **Update on New CDFR Forms**

**Smith** showed some of the detailed results of areas fished in 2005 using the new and improved Captain Daily Fishing Reports (CDFR) with the GPS coordinates added in. The detail is much more refined and easily showed trends over the season and between years. Some of the CDFRs from Daybrook were lost in the storm so the 2005 CDFR dataset is incomplete, but 2006 is looking promising. **Smith** will continue to update the group on its use and the application of the additional data.

### **State and Industry Reports Post-Hurricanes**

The states and industry briefly went over hurricane recovery and reported on progress being made since 2005.

- MDMR was still waiting on FEMA but were back in their building. They have begun to use the Fishery Disaster Funds but at this time, there were no programs for menhaden.
- LDWF was still not in their New Orleans office; the menhaden samplers for the Empire plant were housed in a temporary storage building in Baton Rouge. They hoped to get back to New Orleans soon.
- TPWD indicated that their small fish dealers were hurt the worst; half had not returned since the storm. Texas crabbers were still not back yet and the market channel for crabs being shipped to North Carolina had stopped.
- Daybrook was proud to be able to finish the season out. The problems with the floodgate at Empire made it difficult for the Empire fleet to easily reach the western LA fishing grounds. They often could see the plant from west of the fish factory, but it required 7-8 hours transit to get there. They lost a large portion of their labor pool, and had issues with rookie crews. The 2006 season would be forever dotted with asterisks and footnotes. Empire was still a mess with few people or infrastructure, and the Daybrook plant ran half the season on diesel generators.
- Omega reported similar problems. Cameron had been completely wiped out by Rita; Abbeville and Moss Point were also inundated by flood waters. It was messy, dirty work to dig out, but Omega wanted to acknowledge those who remained and helped them get back to work. Lots of Omega's employees left after the storm and didn't return so they had the same rookie problems. In addition, supply costs to support the laborers they did have rose by 50% after the storm.
- The TPWD took the opportunity to thank Omega for responding positively following a request to not fish near the Texas beaches due to high numbers of large gamefish during summer 2006.
- Finally, Omega has developed a spill recovery vessel to prevent menhaden net spills from reaching the beaches. The new system can be deployed to skim and pump fish off the surface of the water before they reach shore.

### **Update on LNG Facilities in the Gulf**

Jeff Rester updated the MAC on the situation with the proposed LNG facilities and all were glad to hear the reversal of plans for the Freeport facility and its use of the closed loop system after all. Beacon Port should be releasing final EIS shortly and Bienville Offshore Terminal will be releasing its draft EIS soon.

### **Election of Chairman**

**B. Wallace** reported that despite having lost the 'official parchment' in the storm, he knew that the chair position should return to the industry. **C. Perret nominated Rick Schillaci (Omega) as chair and he was elected by unanimous consent.**

### **Other Business**

**J. Mambretti** reported that the US Coast Guard had notified the TPWD regarding their intent to conduct 'live-fire' games in the Texas Point area. The industry was grateful for the information and would warn their vessels.

*With no further business, Mambretti moved to adjourn, Perret seconded and the meeting ended at 4:06 p.m.*