

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**STRIPED BASS TECHNICAL TASK FORCE  
MINUTES  
January 29-31, 2003  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

Chairman Doug Frugé called the meeting to order Wednesday, January 29, 2003, at 1:22 p.m. in the Second Floor Conference Room at the LSU Lod & Carole Cook Conference Center & Hotel. The following were in attendance:

Members Attending

Doug Frugé, USFWS FCO, Ocean Springs, MS  
Larry Nicholson, USM/CMS/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
Howard Rogillio, LDWF, Lacombe, LA  
Rick Long, FWC, Midway, FL (*proxy for Charles Mesing*)  
James M. Barkuloo, USFWS Ret., Panama City, FL  
Pete Cooper, Jr., Saltwater Sportsman, Buras, LA  
Rob Weller, GDNR, Albany, GA

Members Absent

Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
J. Alan Huff, FWC, St. Petersburg, FL  
John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL  
Norman Boyd, TPWD, Port O'Connor, TX  
Ron Garavelli, MDWFP, Jackson, MS  
J.T. Jenkins, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL (*advised by Program Coordinator not necessary to attend until edit of regulations and writing of recommendations sections occur*)  
Isaac Wirgin, NYU School of Medicine, Tuxedo, NY

Guests

John Forester, USFWS, Baton Rouge, LA  
Cedric Doolittle, USFWS, Baton Rouge, LA

Staff

Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Cindy Yocom, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

**P. Cooper, Jr. moved to adopt the agenda as written. L. Nicholson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.**

### Housekeeping/Approval of Minutes

**H. Rogillio moved to adopt the minutes from the meeting held December 5-6, 2001, in New Orleans, Louisiana. L. Nicholson seconded the motion which passed by consensus.** Note: Although three meetings (February, June, and October 2002) have occurred since the December 2001 meeting, a quorum was not present at any of these sessions, and formal action could not take place.

The group discussed task force membership and recurring lack of quorum at called meetings. The problem seems to stem from the fact that the core of the technical task force is made up of the TCC Anadromous Subcommittee. Several members from that group do not actively participate. S. VanderKooy indicated that without objection from the group, he would like to request permission from the State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee to remove non-participating subcommittee members from the task force. No objection was voiced.

### Review of Fishery Management Plan Sections

Several portions of the FMP were reviewed and discussed including the front matter, sections 1-3, and portions of sections 4 and 7. A list of assignments and general reminders is included as attachment 1. As discussion occurred, edits were made directly to the electronic files via computer projection unit.

### Timetable & Deadline for Section Revisions

S. VanderKooy outlined the general time line:

- May – complete sections to GSMFC (except recommendations)
- June – meet to draft recommendations and revise completed sections
- September – meet for line-by-line edit and task force approval
- November-December – forward FMP to Technical Coordinating Committee for review

### Next Meeting

The next meeting was scheduled for June 10-12, 2003. Members agreed to meet in Biloxi, Mississippi.

**There being no further business, the meeting adjourned Friday, January 31, 2003, at 12:00 noon.**

## Attachment 1

- Glossary
  - Add metalimnion, lacustrine, morphometry, dendritic, littoral, hypolimnetic
  - Conversely, take out the terms that are not applicable to this FMP
  - Potadromous - i.e., freshwater only (word of the day)
  - Putative - written out
- Abbreviations
  - Add LLSC
- "fall line" is not capitalized
- Change stocked in to read stocked into
- Convert English units to metric throughout
- Doug check which is proper: refugia or refuges
- Ike - note that revisions were made to genetics section, please review
- Doug – page 3-9, 3.2.4.1. Ask Wilson Laney about OREGON II winter cruises for applicability to migration/movement
- Rick – page 3-11. Add paragraph on movement
- Doug – page 3-11. Check literature on mass migration from Ohio River to new movement paragraph being drafted by Rick
- Doug – page 3-11. Check Forester & Frugé 1993 (assumption of migration)
- Rick & Jim – 3.3.3.1. Try to find D-J report (1962-1964) re: salinity tolerance, St. Johns
- Jim - send Steve, Hill et al. 1981 (re: solids discussion, suspended/dissolved)
- Steve - copy Hill et al. 1981 to the group to determine where solids discussion should be placed
- Michael – 3.6. Check MERCK handbook
- Rick – 4.2. Remove Pee Dee River and replace with Roanoke River reference
- Jim – check buoyancy of eggs (>3.0 ppt?)
- Steve – 4.2.2.1. Add day/night caught. Lukens (19\_\_) Gulf Research Reports

- Steve – 4.3.2.2. Check to see if *Vallisneria* (wild celery) exists in Lake Pontchartrain
- Jim – add Eleven Mile Creek, source of pollution
- 4.3.2.5.6 Move Wacissa to river descriptions
- Doug – 4.3.4.1, last paragraph. Add Keystone Reservoir reproductive population information, add Davin (1999 or 2000) Lake Weiss
- Doug – 4.3.4.2.7. Check for thermal refuges in Sabine
- Doug – LA portion. Check with Bobby Ray about salinity barrier (on Mermentau River) above Lake Charles and hybrids in Bundick Lake
- Steve – Track down (via GCRL library) for Doug: SFI 1976, Horst 1976, Mensinger 1970
- Doug – 4.3.4.5.1, second paragraph. Mention passage of striped bass through the Tennessee/Tombigbee Waterway. Get the years of stocking Gulf race striped bass for the last paragraph
- Majority agreed not to separate river systems by state.
- Jim – check Kirvin report on the Escambia River catch (history)
- Steve – Copy landings data from Section 7 to Section 6?
- Rob – Get commercial info to SJV to add to Section 7
- Larry - Add tag-return data to Section 7
- Rick – 7.2.2.2. Add creel survey information from Lake Talquin
- Steve – check data in the paragraph moved from 7.2.2.2. to 7.2.1.3, where did these numbers come from?
- Steve – note throughout Section 7 that the creel numbers are estimates
- Steve – 2002 dollars are available from Rick
- Steve – Add Federal Aid Reports to 7.2.1.4
- Steve – More information for 7.2.1.5, check with Norman Boyd
- Doug – Check with Terry Stelly for 7.2.1.5 information

- Steve – 7.2.2.4. Refer back to the study from Georgia and fix

# **GULF OF MEXICO REGIONAL PANEL ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES MINUTES**

**February 26-27, 2003  
Pensacola, Florida**

## **Call to Order**

Ron Lukens called the meeting to order at 9:00 am. The following were in attendance:

### **Attendees**

Marilyn Barrett-O'Leary, Louisiana Sea Grant Program, Baton Rouge, LA  
Earl Chilton, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Austin, TX  
Vincent F. Cottone, Chevron/Texaco, New Orleans, LA  
Walter R. Courtenay, Jr., USGS/Center for Aquatic Resources Studies, Gainesville, FL  
Dale Diaz, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, Biloxi, MS  
Pam Fuller, U.S. Geological Survey, Gainesville, FL  
Scott Hardin, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Tallahassee, FL  
Leslie Hartman, Alabama Marine Resources Division, Dauphin Island, AL  
Thomas L. Herrington, FDA, Gulf of Mexico Program Office, Stennis Space Center, MS  
William D. Holland, Gulf of Mexico Program, Stennis Space Center, MS  
Dewayne Hollin, Texas Sea Grant Program, College Station, TX  
Alysia R. Kravitz, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA  
Herb Kumpf, At-Large Member, Panama City, FL  
Jim Long, National Park Service, Atlanta, GA  
Mark McElroy, Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, Baton Rouge, LA  
Tom McIlwain, National Marine Fisheries Service, Pascagoula, MS  
Cynthia Sarthou, Gulf Restoration Network, New Orleans, LA  
Don Schmitz, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, Tallahassee, FL  
Stephanie Showalter, National Sea Grant Law Center, University, MS  
Judy Shearer, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg, MS  
John Teem, Florida Department of Agriculture/Division of Aquaculture, Tallahassee, FL  
Bruce Thompson, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA  
W. Jay Troxel, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Atlanta, GA

## **Review and Adoption of Agenda**

A request was made to add an agenda item to discuss the National Nutria Control Committee. With that addition, Tom McIlwain made a motion to adopt the agenda. The motion was seconded and approved.

## **Review and Approval of Minutes (October 1-2, 2002)**

**Bruce Thompson made a motion to approve the minutes of the meeting held October 1-2, 2002, in Tampa, Florida. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved.**

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## Species Updates (State and Federal)

Herb provide a bulleted list to Ron on issue. Marilyn moved to submit guidelines for use of invasive species or non-native species in science fairs projects. Second by Pat Carter. Without objection this issue will be readdressed this afternoon under work group activities.

Pat Carter expand beyond science fairs, but also classroom use.

Bruce Thompson put this subject under item work group and activities.

Lukens report for Harriet Perry on *Phyllorhiza punctata*, Australian spotted jelly. Handout on sightings, 2001-2002. Believe there is a reproducing population in the Gulf, but not enough data to substantiate that. Not seen an outbreak again the likes of 2000.

Pat Carter - swamp eel update - managing the spread of the Asian swamp eel. Most concerned with Homestead population because of Everglades.

Means of introduction - aquarium release, fish farm release/escape, combination of both. Released as result as a fish food. Put together work group to develop management plan - asian swamp eel control committee. Generic goals, minimize impacts by swamp eels, control spread, prevent new infestations, facilitate research

### Florida objectives:

- slow spread into everglades National park and other natural habitats
- gain better understanding of biology life history, population dynamics
- determine ecological risk
- monitor population status

### Specific Action Items:

- mitigate high risk pathways
- complete risk assessment
- fund priority research
- conduct monitoring surveys
- establish rapid response teams
- implement controls-baited trapping
- develop and disseminated educational materials for specific audiences
- develop a web based ASE data repository

- significant changes - omit electric barriers
- expensive to operate
- reliability/back-up generator required
- public safety concerns

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Present plan to ANS task force for review

The task force met in November 2002

concurrent with other actions/strategies outlines in the draft aSE management plan

requested consideration of additional measures to prevent aSE spread in Everglades National Park

Meeting with company Gunderboom

Gunderboom - engineers, manufactures and supports systems that use aquatic filter barrier technology; examples include:

particulate control

beach protection

reservoir protection

marine life exclusion

Barrier Construction of ASE

Specifications:

-shoreline to shoreline system with surface to bottom seal

-treated polypropylene/polyester fabric curtain

-laser perforations (1.5-2 mm openings)

-100% mandatory exclusion of ASE

-air delivery system for debris control

-will sustain normal flow rates & variable water levels

-can include a spiked deterrent system to prevent eels from walking across barrier

estimate cost \$100,000

other considerations:

-system requires continuous maintenance

-back-up system recommended

-underwater video inspection of seals conducted twice annually (under contract)

-Gunderboom can provide maintenance

Sounds very impressive, that is the proposal to date, sounds feasible

Next steps:

-FWS convene teleconference with partners to discuss barrier proposal

-convene on-site meeting with Gunderboom and partners

-Gunderboom to provide feasibility study

Tom McIlwain - comment on shrimp virus, no problem in this country with virus in last 2 years. Either lucky or doing things right. Outbreak of tora virus...

Lukens - is there still the concern of the virus being brought into the states from imported frozen shrimp

documented seagulls as vectors in spreading the virus.



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December 2001 meeting - proceedings are available, summary document of what we know about shrimp viruses

Lukens - Bob Pitman conflict and could not attend meeting - nothing to add about status of salvinia at this point. Present to the group to establish a salvinia work group. Enough expertise within the panel to form a work group? Bruce - what about the other salvinia, salvinia minima, how about having a work group to address both giant salvinia and salvinia minima.

Marilyn best thing to do for Bob is to identify the salvinia experts in each of the states and provide that information to Bob.

Judy Sheer - a lot of people in the Corps that are working on Salvinia.

Ron to contact each Panel member to compile list of salvinia experts in each state to send to Bob.

Brown Tree Snake Control Team - lot of work going on, pathways in place for snakes to enter Houston area (number of flights from Guam), web page for brown tree snake NABCT.org Scott Hinke is chairman of control team.

Lukens - Black Carp Update, Dennis Riecke, Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks

In 2001 the Tennessee Chapter of the American Fisheries Society (AFS) passed a resolution urging "the State of Tennessee to prohibit the approval of black carp for snail control, or any other use, in or around the waters in the State of Tennessee." The Tennessee Tech Chapter of (AFS) also passed a resolution prohibiting the use of black carp for that purpose.

The North Carolina Chapter of the AFS passed a resolution on February 14, 2003, concerning the introduction of nonindigenous species.

Dennis is the Mississippi representative to the Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association (MICRA), which will meet in Little Rock, Arkansas, February 25-26, 2003 to begin forming a Mississippi River Basin Panel. Update on biological and chemical control methods of snails and a tour of a black carp production facility are planned.

Jim Williams, USGS office in Gainesville, Florida called Dennis in early 2002 to explore the possibility of hiring someone (preferably MDWFP biologists) to sample in Mississippi for black carp. The USFWS Region 4 office has expressed interest in funding the activity. Dennis has had not contact since December and the MDWFP is in favor of doing the sampling. A handout of current research projects at MSU involving black carp was also distributed to the Panel.

Jay Troxel - USFWS has contracted with Jim Williams USGS to develop a field guide on carp. This should be completed this year.

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## Status of State Plans

Texas - Earl Chilton - PowerPoint presentation - Aquatic Vegetation Management in Texas

House Bill 3079 - TPWD was directed to develop a state plan

State Plan:

requires herbicide use be in accordance with EPA and TDA standards

requires 14 day notification for Drinking Water Providers

legislature mandated state plan be a TPWD regulation

Texas most problematic plants: 3 of them - Water hyacinth, hydrilla and salvinia

Plan to issue permit for tripol grass carp for control

Public hearing Monday

Another effort of TPWD is revegetation of native vegetation

Increase in number of African crocodiles sold, Nile crocodiles found for sale in pet market - no state agency has authority to regulate

include caviot in plan a way to cooperate with federal agencies who have authority to regulate

Louisiana - Mark McElroy asked Alysia Kravitz from Tulane to give a presentation. Progress Towards a Louisiana Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan.

2 goals:

- consistent with neighboring states - particularly Gulf of Mexico states
- to produce a highly effective, interesting, and useful management plan

Ways to work on plan Information gathering and Task Force Participation/Interaction:

Homework questions

1. List priority species
2. Rank the impact of aquatic nuisance species
3. Identify all current *pathways-related* issues that allow aquatic nuisance species to reach and spread in Louisiana
4. Identify all *site-specific* issues,
5. Identify all related concerns which exacerbate ANS problems in Louisiana

website: [www.cbr.tulane.edu.is](http://www.cbr.tulane.edu.is)

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## **Results:**

Directive - we will place equal emphasis on pathways and species

Developed a draft outline for Louisiana Aquatic Nuisance Species State Management Plan

Next Task Force meeting on March 26

## **What to expect in the Next Year:**

- mid March 2003 internal draft of management plan to date will be circulated among LAIS Task Force members, will be discussed at March 26 Task Force Meeting

To Governor of Louisiana June 2004

Cynthia Sarthou - if any of the states have information to get out they can use her to get to a public that they may not otherwise get to. Her agency works with all of the five gulf states.

Mississippi - Dale Diaz - currently Mississippi does not have a state plan. In 1999 GSMFC asked Governor Fordice to identify a lead agency for a state plan. So far current Governor Musgrove has not identified a lead agency. MDWFP should be the lead agency. Would like to talk to some other states to see how they got the ball rolling.

Alabama - Leslie Hartman - Alabama has a meeting that has been agency driven and not legislatively driven. Meeting held - wait until new Governor is in place  
Department of Conservation/Freshwater Fish and Game will be lead agency  
Structure, desire in place to do a state plan  
Involved in Part of rapid assessment project to be discussed later  
They need an enforcement buy-in, but that will be difficult

Florida - Don Schmitz - draft of statewide invasive species plan - at the Governor's office now - have not received a response yet. Covers both plant and aquatics.  
Trying to develop a MOU between 9 agencies and 1 university  
Website flash page on how to deal with aquatic nuisance species

## **Presentation of Coordinated Database and Distributed Query**

Pam Fuller - Distributed Query of Aquatic Invasive Species Databases  
effort pushed since the mid-1990's to get this moving  
distributed database is:  
data is not centralized  
allows each data owner to maintain control of their data set  
multiple databases are access simultaneously via a central portal (single web page)  
results of querying multiple database are displayed on a single page

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updates are real-time

start small

USGS NAS Database

-distribution of introduced aquatic freshwater and marine species

-fact sheets on more than 500 species

SERC Databases

primarily marine and estuarine

Chesapeake Bay Database

Emphasizes life history traits

National Database

Literature and fouling surveys

Global Database

Species fact sheet

NatureServe

GSMFC Database

Gulf of Mexico

freshwater to marine

distribution records

species fact sheets

Species fact sheet

NatureServe

Native species distribution

especially endangered and threatened species

Example of query page

Next Steps:

1. Fact Sheet Integration (Dynamic Fact Sheet)

2. Distributed system for real-time mapping

NatureServe for native range

Others for introduced range

3. Seek new partners with additional data sets

Demonstration of database

ISAC meeting next week - scheduled to give demonstration there

Lukens - Information Management Work Group, excited to unveil this at the ISAC meeting. Hope to have a positive response from ISAC next week.

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It is available online, big unveiling next week at ISAC, advertise to get word out on availability

## **Early Warning System for Alien Species**

Donna D. Turgeon, National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science, NOAA -  
National Invasive Species Program: Warning System for Coastal Marine Alien Species

Invasive Species are a Big Issue

the scale of this problem in US coastal marine ecosystems is almost unknown - wild guesses abound

-50,000 alien species now estimated in US

- ~600 alien species identified in US coastal waters

-for lower 48 states, 70-235 alien

How to Reverse Invasion Trends

To control coastal marine alien invaders, managers and scientists need certain information before alien species spread beyond the point of introduction

National Program for Invasive Species

-up-to-data inventory of US coastal marine species

-warning system for verified coastal alien species

-risk assessment and predictions for invasive species

-national information dissemination system

-early detection and monitoring of coastal marine alien species

-federal-state rapid response and mitigation plan

Building the warning System

-create regional and national coastal species and environmental databases; designate regional nodes

-develop a system and data agreements to access and link species inventory names to monitoring data

-build a public

Benefits to Coastal Managers

-an up-to-data inventory of all coastal marine organisms that identifies native, alien, endangered and threatened species by coastal location (e.g., state, island, bay, estuary; GIS location for aliens)

-routinely updated species and environmental data from existing coastal marine monitoring programs

-a web page where new monitoring data can be checked

How This will be Accomplished

-led by NOAA/NOS, partners are drafting a national and pilot plan and developing

Coastal Inventory of Species

-there is no inventory of the ~30-50 thousand species in US coastal waters

-with our partner AFS and the effort of

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## **What the Website Will Offer**

- on-site registration for individual users
- access to species verification help from renowned taxonomic experts
- computer

## **How the Website Will Work**

testing is done, went out last spring to begin working with it

## **How the Website Will Look**

data layers

## **Reasons Hawaii Selected for Pilot**

- 300+ coastal aliens in "Endangered Species Capitol"
- NOAA's coral reef initiative and existing partnerships
- Bishop Museum and the Hawaiian Biological Survey could provide a credible inventory of Hawaiian species

## **Hawaiian Pilot Partners**

- Partnerships are essential to building

## **FY03 Pilot Products**

- inventory of US coastal species
- alien reporting mechanism
- automatic alerts for new alien species
- information to identify and control coastal marine invasive species

## **FY04 and Beyond for the Pilot**

- peer review the final list of Hawaiian coastal marine species
- test the web-based early warning system
- develop risk assessment protocols
- establish a Hawaiian early detection and monitoring capability for coastal alien species

## **Closing Remarks**

Based upon the Hawaiian Pilot test results, begin developing databases and capability in other regions of the United States

in presenting to the Panel, how you might like or would like to see

Pat Carter - this system could really complement the system Pam is working on.

Lukens - we clearly do not want to duplicate effort

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## **Status of Alabama/Mississippi Rapid Assessment Project**

Lukens - update on Alabama/Mississippi Rapid Assessment Team (AMRAT)  
written information provided by Harriet Perry and review by R. Lukens

### **Funding:**

- Applying for NOAA monies to conduct rapid assessment study of Mobile Bay. Grant would come through the Southeast Fisheries Science Center with Dr. Tom McIlwain as Principal Investigator and AMRAT agencies as sub-contractors to carry out the assessment.
- \$15,000 in funding from NEP
- \$10,000 in funding from MASGC (to be split between Alabama and Mississippi)

**Date for Assessment** - September 2 through 5, 2003

### **Assessment Teams by Category and Agency:**

- Subtidal - Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, Alabama Marine Resources Department, Mississippi Department

*Point of clarification for rapid assessment of Mobile Bay - contact Harriet Perry or Lukens if you have resources and would like to participate*

## **Discussion of Work Groups and Activities**

Lukens - standing workgroups approved by regional panel at last meeting

1. Pathways and Prevention: Marilyn O'Leary, Pam Fuller, Dennis Reiche,
2. Eradication, Control and Restoration - Herb Kumpf, Earl Chilton, Ron Lukens  
Add Pat Carter and Leslie Hartman
3. Vessel Mediated Transport - Add John Meyers, Coast Guard and Don Schmitz
4. Research and Development - Herb, David Hicks, Pam, Tom McIlwain Earl Chilton, Ron Lukens  
Add Bruce Thompson (ask Harriet Perry to be on this work group)
5. Education and Outreach - Don Schmitz, Nanette Holland, Marilyn O'Leary, Bob Pittman, Chuck Jacoby, Ron Lukens, Dale Diaz
6. Early detection and rapid response. Add Don Schmitz and Tom Herrington

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7. Information Management.

That is current status of work groups.

Herb - should each member of the Panel serve on at least one work group?

Earl Chilton - Bob Hollis for Research and Development or Pathways and Prevention

Pat Carter Joe Stern - education and outreach. Also add Pat Carter to that one too

Ron to email copy of revised list of work group memberships

Eradication, Research, Education, and Information Management - Jim Long?

Budgeted for 3 work group meetings this year. Identified some activities - early detection processes and rapid response strategy under same work group

Information and Management already going - issues with Pam's presentation and web page by GSMFC for the Regional Panel. Work group to look at outline. May want to have an initial conference call and a meeting some time this year for input on direction for revamping web page.

In folder "guidelines for early detection and rapid response", developed by working group of ISAC. Work group read handout thoroughly and schedule a conference call to discuss.

GSMFC can host conference calls for any other work groups.

Marilyn suggest that website have a private part for Panel members only that continually has information that work groups are doing

Pat Carter - Recommend comprehensive list of what all other... ( end of Side 3B)

Lukens - Pathways and Prevention - ISAC working on, report not released for outside review, documents like this can be good starting point for our work groups.

Encourage all to subscribe to List Serve on GSMFC website.

Put science fair issue under work group - Education and Outreach - can first be addressed via conference call.



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**Motion made by Marilyn earlier - any objection to charging education and outreach workgroup to develop guidelines for science fairs on the use of invasive species in projects. No objection.**

*Point of clarification for rapid assessment of Mobile Bay - contact Harriet Perry or Lukens if you have resources and would like to participate*

### **Discussion of Steering Committee**

Lukens - charge to steering committee discussed in operating procedures next. Last meeting Panel expressed desire to have a steering committee comprised of Panel members. Does not act in the absence of the full regional panel, will not make decisions, designed to help develop agenda, address some administrative issues such as first draft of operating procedures, intercessional actions that will help make panel run more smoothly and panel meetings run more smoothly.

Currently Lukens as Chair, Bruce Thompson, Pam Fuller, Herb Kumpf, Don Schmitz and Marilyn O'Leary.

Had meeting yesterday afternoon. Found to be valuable. Issue of science fair came up there and was incorporated into meeting today. Established the steering committee by those that responded first.

How long should each person be on the steering committee - question by Earl Chilton. Should be discussed in relation to election of chairman and their term.

### **Discussion of Panel Operating Procedures**

Lukens distributed draft "Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species Standard Operating Procedures"

The first section outlines the panel and how it was established. The Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species (Panel) is a panel of individuals representing state and federal, organizations, industries, associations, and private citizens with authorities to and/or interest in addressing non-native and/or invasive species issues. The Panel is established under the authority of the National Invasive Species Act of 1996, which reauthorized the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990 (NANPCA). The Panel serves as an advisory body and reports to the National Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force (ANSTF) established under the authority of the NANPCA.

Panel membership is comprised of standing members and non-standing members. Standing members of the Panel include state fish and wildlife management agencies from the States of Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida; and federal agencies include US Environmental Protection Agency, National Park Service, Food and Drug Administration, National Marine Fisheries

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Service, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Navy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

All members other than Standing Members will be selected and approved by the Panel. Non-standing members will be appointed for a period of 2 years, at which time organizations holding Non-standing member seats may be replaced. If no specific action is taken, organizations holding Non-standing member seats will continue to serve until asked to resign.

Any standing or non-standing member may designate an alternate to serve on the Panel in the place of a named member.

Standing Members:  
Add Sea Grant and GSMFC

### **Meeting Procedures**

Voting procedures - question on email vote re: FACA guidelines.

Jay Troxel - you can do email and get consensus on an issue, then formalize with a vote at panel meeting.

Committee/Work Group Meetings -does not have to be advertised in Federal Register because any action would have to go through the whole Panel

### **Chair and Vice-chair**

Cynthia and Earl - vice-chair MAY be elevated to the Chair upon formal election by the Panel. (This was later revised with suggestion by Tom Herrington to use same wording for chair and vice-chair)

The chairman would then serve as a steering committee member after their term.

Marilyn - consider one year terms because it would be a 3 year commitment rather than a 5 year commitment.

Lukens not a significant work load for chair or vice-chair.

Bruce Thompson - add function of the chair to operating procedures?

No, do not put a definitive description.

Recommend that the Past Chair will serve as a member of the Steering Committee.

Tom Herrington suggested use same wording for vice-chair as written for Chair. It was the

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consensus of the group.

The chair of the Panel will also serve as chair of the Steering Committee.

Under Committees/Steering Committee - Change wording:

The Chair and Vice-chair will be members of the Steering Committee.

Work Groups -

Remove last sentence: Work Groups will not operate independent of the Panel.

**Motion by Cynthia Sarthou to adopt procedures with changes as the standard operating procedures of the Panel. Motion seconded and adopted without objection.**

## **Status and Discussion of Activities of the ANS Task Force**

Last Task Force meeting in November 2002.

Actions taken at meeting

ANS approved state plans for Alaska, Maine,....

The Mississippi River Basin Regional Panel was approved

Meeting held in Honolulu, Impressed with magnitude and scope of invasive species in Hawaii, Hawaii expressed that a regional panel be established for Hawaii and the Pacific Islands

## **Status and Discussion of Activities of the Invasive Species Council and ISAC**

Big issue is to get the Council to meet to show people that invasive species is a high priority issue in the federal government.

Version 1 of

Big issue is cross-cut budget. Consuming massive amount of staff time for Council staff.

In future try to get staff from Task Force and Council to attend Panel meetings.

## **Public Comment**

No public comment was received.

The meeting recessed at 5:00 pm.

# **GULF OF MEXICO REGIONAL PANEL ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES MINUTES**

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Thursday, February 27, 2003

## **Presentation on Educational Materials**

Marilyn discuss things doing in Louisiana because Panel needs to address same type of thing. Briefing book, you have to keep educating your Task Force. Second most important audience is the general public. Educating the general public and raising their awareness to get their participation. Brochure, recommend that our Panel develop something like this. Best target is to the children, Oh No, Hannah's Swamp is Changing - story book cost of \$10.00 targeted at grades 3-5. Children learn at an early age about their responsibility for the environment.

## **Presentation on the Western Regional Panel**

Scott Smith

Western Regional Panel Actions and Ballast Water Management

Why should we have Regional Panels?

- Increase state involvement
  - coordinate the implementation of effective state programs
- educate members about ANS problems and solutions
- Address issues of regional concern
- Synchronize authorities and programs

Draft WRP recommended state actions - provide input or comments

Western Regional Panel

- formed by NISA in 1996
- includes 19 western states and 4 Canadian Provinces
- first meeting held in Portland, Or in July of 1997
- annual meetings and monthly Executive Committee conference calls
- annual work plan

Examples of WRP Work Plan Projects

- completed a model rapid response plan
- created "Threats to the West" brochures and displays
- facilitating the writing of state plans for AZ and CA. Other states soon.
- conducted a workshop on intentional introductions
- creating a list of recommended state actions

The WRP is working with Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission and the Pacific Ballast Water

## **GULF OF MEXICO REGIONAL PANEL ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES MINUTES**

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Group to coordinate ballast management on the Pacific coast.

Implementing Alternative Ballast Treatment in Washington State

- mandate ballast reporting and exchange
- established a standard for ballast treatment
  - 95% kill or removal of zooplankton
  - 99% kill or removal of phytoplankton and bacteria
- established an interim approval process for ballast treatment methods
- mandated treatment or exchange by July 2004

Ballast water reporting program

WDFW is working with the UW and the Glosten Assoc.

- developing systems for the verification of exchange using onboard sensors (USCG funded)
- developing methods to verify a vessels capacity to achieve a 95% volumetric exchange (WDFW funded)
- modeling the dilution of ballast discharges...

Other pathways being looked at is the pet trade...

### **State Survey Report**

National Aquatic Invasive Species Survey

Lukens - results from survey in conjunction with IAFWA, 44 states responded.  
Designed to identify various strategies and programs

1. How important is the issue of aquatic invasive species to your agency?
2. How would you rate your level of awareness of federal legislation dealing with aquatic invasive species?
3. How would you rate the level of your awareness of ongoing federal efforts dealing with aquatic invasive species
4. Does your agency address the issue of aquatic invasive species?
5. Why does your agency not address this issue?
6. What general authorities grant your agency the ability to address the aquatic invasive species issue?
7. What specific strategies does your agency use to address this issue? Does your agency have...?
8. What program within your agency directs efforts to address aquatic invasive species?
9. which of the following best describes the title of the person filling out the survey
- 10.
11. Please check the approach that best describes your state's approach to addressing aquatic

## **GULF OF MEXICO REGIONAL PANEL ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES**

### **MINUTES**

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invasive species.

12. If your agency utilizes a Comprehensive or Limited Approach, please indicate which programmatic elements your state employs in

13.

14. What are the reasons describe why your agency does not participate in a Regional Cooperative Program?

15. If your agency has a Management Program, which of the following elements are part of your agency's Management Program?

16. If your agency has a Regulatory Program, which of the following areas fall under your agency's regulatory powers?

17. Does your agency use the American Fisheries Society Policy Statement on the Introduction of Aquatic Species as guidance for its decision-making processes?

18. If you agency regulates the importation of aquatic species, which

19.

20. besides ecological impacts, what other criteria does your agency use to make its permitting decisions?

21. If your agency has a Regulatory Program for aquatic invasive species, which of the following regulatory mechanisms are used?

22. If your agency uses a Classification System, please indicate the categories your agency uses in aquatic invasive species classification.

23. If your agency has an Educational Program addressing aquatic invasive species, which of the following elements describe this program?

24. How does your agency assess whether a species should be identified or treated as an aquatic invasive species? Would you say that non-native aquatic species are designated a nuisance based on their impact to:

25. Thinking about the primary aquatic invasive species concerns for your state, please rank the following where 1 indicates a very high concern and 10 indicates a very low concern in your state.

26. Which of the following aquatic invasive species concerns does your agency have the authority to address?

27. Is your agency the only state agency with the legal authority to address aquatic invasive species issues?

28. What phrase best describes your agency's relative position in your state when addressing the aquatic invasive species issue?

29. What are the other agencies (if any) that address the aquatic invasive species issue?

30. What is/are the state agencies that your cooperate or consult with and what are the general focus areas of these other agencies/entities

Ranked by Agency and then response within agency

31. If your agency is part of a coastal state, how would you describe your relationship with the state Sea Grant program with respect to the aquatic invasive species issue?

32. What are the approximate annual budgetary allocations for the various state-level programs that your know about?

35. What sources of funding does your agency use to support its efforts to address the aquatic

## **GULF OF MEXICO REGIONAL PANEL ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES MINUTES**

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nuisance/invasive species issue?

36. Approximately, how many FTEs (full-time staff positions) does your agency dedicate to the aquatic invasive species

37.

38. Of the following items, what are the most significant obstacles your agency faces in addressing the aquatic invasive species issue?

39. This year Congress is supposed to reauthorize the National Invasive Species Act. A provision in this law addresses state involvement. Do you agree or disagree

40. The current law requires states to develop and submit a state ANS management and implementation plan to the USFWS for consideration of grant funding. Some states have indicated that they do not have the staffing an/or financial resources to pull someone away from other responsibilities to develop a plan without guarantee

41. If these restrictions'

42. Has

43. How did your agency present this information?

44. What were the results of this presentation?

45. Currently, the USFWS is providing limited funding for efforts to

46. Which of these tools would be valuable to you?

47.

48. Would you say you are very interested, somewhat interested..

### **Status and Discussion of National Legislation**

NAISA bill -

Bill scheduled to reintroduced on Tuesday, postponed and is supposed to be today

Begins with definitions

Page 14 begins with ballast water provisions

Page 51 begins the prevention of aquatic by other pathways

Page 60 begins the discussion of early detections, rapid response control and outreach

Page 66 - cost sharing

Page 75 - environmental soundness

Page 78 - reinforces the brown tree snake control team - Bob Pitman has asked that we address brown tree snakes in some fashion

Next page - national nutria control program

Page 87 - research section

Page 111 - section on coordination

Page 109 comment by Bruce Thompson - taxonomic

Page 114 line 11 talks about interstate organizations/Ron language being proposed to add

Page 121 authorization of appropriations

State support will be one of the main ways to get this bill passed.

# **GULF OF MEXICO REGIONAL PANEL ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES MINUTES**

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Ehlers Bill - codify the Invasive Species Council and establish it in law.

Herb - discrepancy between the Bill and the Executive Order. Charge to federal agencies in the Executive Order left out of bill. Executive Order much more emphatic on role of federal agencies.

## **Status and Discussion of the 2002 Annual Report**

Copies of Gulf of Mexico Region Panel - transitions....2002 Annual Report was distributed to the Panel members. It will be presented to the Task Force. Provide feedback to Lukens after reviewing it. Education and outreach work group could take on issue of developing next annual report. Consider what they would like to recommend to the Panel as long term production of this report as a publication/outreach tool.

## **NAISA Support Letter**

example for you use. Great Lakes area is doing this.

## **Nutria Control Committee**

Ron send email to Panel for nominations to serve on the National nutria control committee. Please send contact information. Ron will set a deadline for submissions. Ron will compile the information.

## **Other Business**

Vince - possibility of attack on offshore facility. Gulf Safety Committee under the Coast Guard - not a FACA committee. Operate through a website (he will send website address to Ron) limited to southeast Louisiana  
concern from Keys to Brownsville  
Vince was elected as Chair of that committee to serve 2 years

Stephanie funded through Gulf of Mexico Program  
on state level - analyzing state laws  
if you know that your state has a problem or a certain need in your state send her an email.

## **Next Meeting Time and Place**

Ron recommend August to November  
Suggest after September for that rapid response assessment in Mobile Bay is done  
Lukens to look at mid to late September for dates  
Gulf Shores or New Orleans



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MINUTES**

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**Election of Officers**

Tom Herrington motion Lukens as Chairman and Tom McIlwain as Vice-chair, Second by Don Schmitz

**Public Comment**

Earl publication of invasive species in Texas.

*There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:55 am.*

APPROVED BY:

Tom Wagner  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TCC CRAB SUBCOMMITTEE  
MINUTES - 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Spring Meeting  
Monday, March 17, 2003  
Point Clear, Alabama**

Subcommittee Chairman Tom Wagner (Texas) was unable to attend the meeting due to out-of-state travel restrictions. He requested Harriet Perry act as his proxy, and she called the meeting to order at 12:57 p.m. The attendance was as follows:

**Members Present**

Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Vince Guillory, LDWF, Bourg, LA  
Leslie Hartman, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL  
Harriet Perry, USM/CMS/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS

**Members Absent**

Anne McMillen-Jackson, FWS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Tom Wagner, TPWD, Rockport, TX

**Staff**

Jeff Rester, Habitat Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, IIF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Cindy Yocom, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Robert Adami, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX  
Columbus Brown, FWS, Atlanta, GA  
Paul Cook, LDWF, New Iberia, LA  
Frank Courtney, FWC/FMRI, Port Manatee, FL  
Doug Frugé, FWS, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve Heath, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD  
Wendell Lorio, MSU, Stennis Space Center, MS  
Bill Richardson, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Leslie Turney, ADEM, Mobile, AL  
Virginia Vail, *GSMFC Commissioner*, FWC, Tallahassee, FL  
Heather Warner-Finley, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA

**Agenda**

By consensus, the agenda was approved as written.

## Minutes

The group reviewed the minutes from meeting held October 18, 2002. **H. Perry** noted a one word addition to page 37 and the correction of “bath” to “bad” on page 43. **T. Floyd** noted a correction to Mississippi landings from 43,000 pounds to 430,000 pounds on page 44. **T. Floyd moved that the minutes be adopted as corrected. L. Hartman second the motion which passed unanimously.**

## Gulf Crab Trap Fishery & Marine Mammal Interaction

Mark LaSalle (Sea Grant) was unable to attend the meeting; **S. VanderKooy** updated the group. A meeting was held the week of March 10 with representatives from NOAA Marine Mammals, Sea Grant, and the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. As the Subcommittee is aware, NOAA Fisheries was going to raise the crab fishery from Category III to Category II. The Crab Subcommittee protested strongly since NOAA data was extremely weak. Ten dolphins were impacted in fourteen years – possibly attributable to crab traps. While there is some level of interaction between crab gear and dolphins in the Gulf, it is a minor component of dolphin mortality. The fact that there is already a commercial fishery in the Gulf that has been elevated based on dolphin interaction has triggered the elevation of the crab fishery. The real problem is that the Marine Mammal Protection Act cannot address recreational fisheries. The only jurisdiction the MMPA has is on commercial fisheries. NOAA Fisheries is trying to rewrite the language while the MMPA is up for reauthorization; however, they do not feel the new language addressing recreational fisheries will pass. Reclassification of the commercial crab trap fishery is on hold pending our cooperation to work on outreach and education.

The cooperative project with Sea Grant, NOAA Fisheries, and the GSMFC addresses background issues and will develop a bottlenose dolphin education and outreach plan. This plan will be proactive, involve all stakeholder groups, address the entire suite of threats, and is holistic toward dolphin conservation. A proactive, collaborative and holistic approach will serve to engage all potential stakeholders, avoid potential conflicts, and avoid the need for regulatory action.

Bottlenose dolphin populations across the Gulf of Mexico face a wide range of natural and human interactions. Knowledge of dolphin population levels and the degree to which impacts affect dolphins is minimal. Better information is needed on stock assessment, sources of impacts, impact assessment, and management practices to reduce impacts.

Direct impacts to dolphins include: tourism, commercial vessels, recreational fishing, dredging, commercial fishing, boating, and acoustical impacts. Indirect impacts to dolphins include habitat degradation (water quality, changes in prey base, and habitat loss) and land-based (point and non-point source pollution, endocrine disrupters, and harmful algal blooms).

In a near-term approach, NOAA Fisheries, Sea Grant, and GSMFC will begin work on a three to five year strategic plan. The team will identify and prioritize steps and identify resources and needs. The plan will begin with an outreach and assessment effort focused on the blue crab fishery.

**H. Perry** inquired whether the Subcommittee would be involved throughout the development of this plan. **S. VanderKooy** stated that all the details have not been hammered out; however, it will primarily be a federal effort between NOAA Fisheries and Sea Grant. Our role is to endorse the holistic approach. Targeting one specific group is not the answer. The development of educational materials should address all user groups. No major commitment is required except to endorse the principle. NOAA Fisheries needs to know that we believe a holistic approach is the better approach rather than penalizing one fishery for minor, insignificant take.

**H. Perry** noted that the Derelict Trap Task Force (whose core group is the Crab Subcommittee) would be the best group to provide input into the development of the plan since many groups have a stake in this process. The task force has representatives from law enforcement, habitat, commercial and recreational fisheries, and Sea Grant. **T. Floyd moved that the Crab Subcommittee and additional representatives from the Derelict Trap Task Force be involved throughout the development of NOAA's strategic plan for education and outreach to all user groups to address dolphin interaction. V. Guillory seconded the motion which passed unanimously.** **H. Perry** noted that this action will let NOAA Fisheries know at the beginning of the process that this group wants to be involved. The group would not necessarily have to attend all meetings, but comments should flow back and forth throughout the development process. Mark LaSalle (Sea Grant and Derelict Trap Task Force) already attends the meetings as well as S. VanderKooy. S. VanderKooy can coordinate the distribution of information between the groups.

### **Status of the Community-Based Restoration Proposal**

The TCC Habitat Subcommittee and coordinator J. Rester came in for this discussion. **J. Rester** thanked everyone for helping out with their portions of the proposal. Last Friday, he spoke with Tom Moore at NOAA Restoration. There are currently eight to ten reviewers reviewing each proposal, and all reviews are due in mid April. This year the Community Based Restoration Program received approximately \$10-\$12 million in requests for support. Unfortunately, their budget was cut by \$1 million. This only leaves \$1.5 million to fund projects. NOAA Restoration will make funding decisions the first week in May, and successful projects will receive notification the first week in June.

Tom Moore suggested that we might want to look at other partnerships that are available. The Gulf Ecological Management Sites Partnerships will be open to all organizations. In the past, it has only been available to GEMS partners. Requests for Proposals should come out in late summer, early fall for 2004 funding. He also stated that the reviewers will also provide suggestions for other funding sources. One final question that Moore had was whether or not the derelict trap program is scalable. The

proposed budget is \$250,000 for the project. Moore was concerned about the price tag, since they only have \$1.5 million. He inquired whether \$100,000 would be worth our time and effort. He also stated that we might be able to use \$100,000 as match with another funding partner.

This was discussed between Rester and H. Perry while driving to the Alabama cleanup. She suggested that the program could be rotated from state to state at a lower level of funding. This would be one way to share the money. Rester asked for the group's input.

**H. Perry** asked whether the proposals are being peer reviewed or internally through NOAA. **Rester** understood the reviews to be internal. **Perry** noted that if Moore has some insight whether the proposal will not be funded at \$250,000, it would be helpful to know. On the other hand, if good reviews are received, it would be preferable to request the \$250,000.

**J. Rester** noted that Moore seemed to be leaning toward the \$100,000, but Moore also stated that he had not even looked at the final proposal. **L. Hartman** felt that receiving \$100,000 is certainly worthwhile. Texas went from collecting 8,000 traps the first year to 4,000 traps the second. A clear reduction is seen. The first two to three back-to-back cleanups may do so much good that the states may then be able to go to biannual cleanups. If \$100,000 is received, the states that have not had a cleanup would have enough funding to work with, and the remaining states could take that year off. Is, however, the funding be renewable from year to year?

**J. Rester** stated that the group would be reapplying every year. There is always the possibility that we would receive funding for the first year, but funding might not be granted for subsequent years. **H. Perry** noted that the funding could be divided equally among the states. There are other entities that may partnership with the states and match the funding.

**H. Perry** suggested and the Subcommittee concurred that J. Rester speak to T. Moore after he has read the final proposal. Rester should try to get a better feeling where the proposal stands at that point and report back to the Subcommittee via E-mail. **J. Rester** said he would call on Friday (March 21) and report back. **Frank Courtney** suggested funding from other groups such as National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the ASA Fish and Wildlife Association.

**H. Perry** opened discussion on deep-water trap cleanup. None of the states have adequately addressed this problem. **Bill Richardson** noted that the "gorilla trawl" used to collect these traps cost \$2,600 per day for 16' boat, crew, fuel, and net. It may not be that difficult to have these trawls built. It is just a reinforced trawl with chains that was traditionally used to pick up scrap from offshore rigs. The states have the ability to locate large accumulations of traps. Mississippi has mapped several areas with large accumulations of traps using side scan sonar. There are other areas that may be better left alone; some accumulations have formed reefs.

## **Recent Derelict Trap Cleanups**

**Gulf of Mexico Overview** - **H. Perry** reported that cleanups have occurred in the Gulf of Mexico in Texas, Alabama, and Mississippi. In Texas Parks and Wildlife Department's first cleanup, 60 organizations and businesses participated, as well as 554 volunteers. There were 228 vessels involved in the cleanup which pulled 8,070 traps, 6,888 of which were removed the first day. Texas' second cleanup removed 3,858 traps from the water. There were 494 volunteers, and 152 vessels participated. Law enforcement removed 97 traps.

The Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources/Marine Resource Division has a dual component cleanup – shallow and deep water. In June 2002, fishermen were required to move traps beyond 100 yards of shore. As a result, 354 traps were removed within the area 100 yards to the shore. The deep water component coincided with the first seven days of the 2002 shrimp season. All traps had to be removed from areas open to shrimping. There were 124 traps removed during the deep water component. In Alabama's 2003 cleanup, traps were required to be moved 500 yards from shore, and 1,020 traps were removed.

The Mississippi cleanup program began in January 2000 and is a joint effort between the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources and the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory. As of December 2002, 2,200 derelict traps have been removed from Mississippi's waters. Coastal Impact Assistance Funds have been used to promote a more directed effort.

**Mississippi** - **H. Perry** reported that the Mississippi Legislature allowed for a two-week closed season in January 2003 which allowed the program to include a volunteer-based removal effort. Crab fishermen were allowed to remove their traps from the water during the first week. In the second week, the MDMR and GCRL were allowed to remove any traps remaining in the water. Bycatch data was collected for all traps removed by the department and lab. On the final day of the closed season, volunteers were encouraged to participate in the cleanup efforts. There were 38 volunteers on 18 vessels. Scientific data was collected on 1,111 traps, and a total of 1,405 traps were removed over a five-day period. Bycatch data included:

- 1,488 live crabs released
- 91% of traps without bait, 9% baited
- From non-baited traps
  - 32% had crab bycatch
  - Average catch per trap = 0.78 crabs
- From baited traps
  - 86% had crab bycatch
  - Average catch per trap = 9 crabs
- 9% of non-baited traps had fish bycatch
- 70 live fish released, 17 dead fish
- Sheepshead (51); mullet (6); flounder (7); toadfish (11); croaker (3); unidentified (6)

- One each - red drum, catfish, gray snapper

Other bycatch included six diamondback terrapins, one red ear turtle, 33 stone crabs, one cormorant, one clapper rail, one rat, and three jellyfish.

Alabama - **L. Hartman** reported that Alabama finished an incredibly successful cleanup on March 15, 2003. Preliminary counts show that 1,020 traps were removed. At least 200 volunteers participated, a significant increase from the cleanup in June 2002. A number of volunteers never left the dock because the division needed people to stay at dumpster sites to collect data sheets. An impressive array of volunteers included groups from the CCA, Sea Scouts, the Girl Service Corp., and Key Clubs. Regulations were written to allow the use of air boats for the cleanup. Four air boats were registered to work south of causeway, and two worked north of the causeway. Air boats, canoes, and kayaks did an excellent job in shallow areas. A number of donations were received for the cleanup, and incentive bags were provided to all volunteers. The long-sleeved T-shirt was received positively, especially by volunteers working in gnat-infested areas. National Estuary Program funds were used during this cleanup. A deep water cleanup is scheduled for June 2003 which will coincide with the opening of shrimp season. They hope to have more commercial crab fishermen involved in the next cleanup.

## State Reports

Florida - No report.

Alabama - **L. Hartman** reported fishermen are complaining about the dropping price for blue crabs. In July-August 2001, the lowest price received for blue crabs was 59¢ per pound. In 2002, the lowest price received was 50¢ per pound in November. Landings seemed to be down as well, and overall 2001 landings averaged 2.5 million pounds. Mean catch in Alabama from 1990-1999 is 3.1 million pounds. Alabama is still having problems getting accurate reports from some of their larger vendors.

Some fishermen are pulling out of the fishery; this is not a surprise. Fuel prices are rising, and crab prices are going down. Some of the Asian processors have shut down. They may not be going out of business; it may be a seasonal shut down. License sales are steady at 170. About 10% of these are watermen and work dual fisheries. No new regulations are forecast.

Mississippi - **T. Floyd** reported that Mississippi does not have a trip ticket system for the crab fishery, yet. Landings are up in 2002; 700,000 pounds were landed as compared to 430,000 pounds in 2001. License sales are down slightly with 685 recreational fishermen and 185 commercial fishermen. Ordinance changes have gone into effect in Mississippi. Beginning March 1, 2003, crab trap buoys must be attached by non-floating or weighted float line. This requirement will help prevent trap lines from being clipped by boat propellers and contributing to the problem of lost traps. Effective January 1, 2004, a permanent stainless steel, aluminum, or plastic trap tag identifying the licensed fisherman must be attached to all crab traps. The trap tags

must be legibly and permanently stamped with letters containing the applicable licensed crab fisherman's full name. The minimum height of the letters must be 3/16". The tags must be supplied by the fisherman. Mandated utilization of trap tags is being added to help facilitate law enforcement in cases of theft and to help fishermen identify their lost traps.

Louisiana - **V. Guillory** reported preliminary landings through November 2002 were 48.9 million pounds. This is quite surprising since prices were so low during the summer, and some dealers had fishermen on a quota (i.e., dealers may not buy the fishermen's entire catch). There is a myriad of legislation coming up concerning the fishery. Most importantly is Senate Bill No. 45 which authorizes the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission to establish a program for removal of abandoned crab traps. This bill specifies the beginning and ending dates for a seasonal closure, specifies the geographic area in which the use of crab traps would be prohibited, and specifies who would be authorized to remove the abandoned traps. There are two time periods when the Commission will have the authority for a closure – the first, during the winter between February 1 and March 31 for up to sixteen consecutive days (which would include three full weekends) and the second, which would close the trap season during a fourteen consecutive day period and include the opening day of the spring, inshore shrimp season. The second phase would address the deep water traps. The bill has strong support and is expected to pass in the upcoming Legislative session. The Louisiana Crab Task Force is in support of the winter closure; however, it is opposed to the spring closure. They claim that spring is when both hard and peeler crab catches are higher, and the spring closure may prove an economical hardship.

The Crab Task Force is also introducing two bills. The first would extend the time when escape rings must be opened. In Louisiana, you can officially close the escape rings from April 1 through June 30. The proposed bill would extend the time where the rings must be open through March 1. The second bill sponsored by the task force addressed fish bycatch. The commercial fishermen would like to retain some fish bycatch for sustenance purposes. At present, it is illegal to retain fish bycatch from crab traps. The bill excludes spotted seatrout and red drum.

There are also several bills being sponsored by various industry groups concerning enforcement of undersized crab regulations. One statute states that an enforcement agent may check unboiled crabs. The language is ambiguous, and industry would like the language to read that agents can check only unboiled crabs. Another industry-sponsored bill would require all enforcement of undersized crab regulations (in addition to all other fish species) be done prior to the first sale. This originated from crab dealers because catch is sorted based on size. Once the larger crabs are removed for the live market, the remaining crate may contain over the 10% tolerance of undersized crab.

**V. Guillory** reported that he and Tom Wagner attended a very interesting meeting in San Antonio on whooping cranes and blue crabs. Whooping cranes overwinter on the Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the central Texas coast. During the winter,



investigators have determined that 60% to 98% of their energy is derived from feeding on blue crabs. Studies have also found out that whooping cranes may leave the wintering grounds to migrate north which is related to nesting productivity. The meeting goal was to begin work on a model to relate changes in river flow to blue crab abundance to the fat-content of whooping cranes. There are plans to divert water from the San Antonio River to be used for the city's water supply. This would decrease the amount of water flowing down the river into the marshes where blue crabs and whooping cranes are found. Texas A&M is leading the project to evaluate the potential impacts from diversions and river discharge on salinity, blue crabs, and the fat-content in whooping cranes.

Texas - Although Tom Wagner was unable to attend due to out-of-state travel restrictions, he did provide the Texas report as follows:

Just under 4,000 crab traps were collected during the February 15-March 2 closure with help from 494 volunteers and 152 vessels. This compares to over 8,000 traps removed during last year's initial closed season. Data collection from approximately 250 traps coast wide have not yet been tabulated. This information will be forwarded to the Subcommittee as soon as it is available. Preliminary notes include:

- Blue crabs (83% live), sheepshead (91% live), and stone crab (80% live) were the dominant bycatch species recorded; one diamondback terrapin was released alive.
- 90% of traps were in water rather than on land.
- 45% of traps had identification (tags, floats) compared to 42% last year.
- 73% were considered 'usable' compared to 34% last year.
- 20% had identifiable degradable panels present compared to 34% last year.
- 83% had escape rings present compared to 67% last year.

Note: These numbers are subject to change as remaining data cards are received.

Preliminary 2002 hard crab landings are 5.1 million pounds, approximately the same as the 5.16 million reported in 2001. Heavy rains beginning in September 2002 should benefit recruitment and thus commercial landings for 2003.

No legislative changes affecting the blue crab fishery in Texas are proposed this year.

T. Wagner provided two handouts: TPWD Management Data Series #180 *Shrimp Bycatch Characterizations Studies, 1993-1995* and the TPWD News Release dated March 10, 2003 on the second crab trap cleanup.

### **National Shellfisheries Association Meeting**

**H. Perry** encouraged the group to attend the 95<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the National Shellfisheries Association. The meeting is being held April 14-17, 2003, in New Orleans, Louisiana, at the DoubleTree Hotel. She will be chairing the session entitled "Biology, Fisheries, and Culture of the Blue Crab, *Callinectes sapidus*." Session presentations include:

- Hatchery mass production of blue crab juveniles. (Zohar et al.)
- Blue crab genetic structure and diversity. (Place et al.)
- Assessing the feasibility of stock enhancement for Chesapeake blue crabs. (Hines et al.)
- Status of the blue crab populations in Louisiana based on fishery independent data collections (1967-2002) with observations on relative abundance in other Gulf States. (Guillory et al.)
- Development of derelict trap removal programs in the Gulf of Mexico. (Perry et al.)
- Population genetics of the blue crab in the Gulf of Mexico. (Darden and Kreiser)
- Observations on the unusual abundance of tropical *Callinectes* species in the south Atlantic bight in fall 2002, and remarks on the non-indigenous *Charybdis hellerii*. (Knott et al.)
- Design and implementation of survey of commercial blue crab effort in the Maryland portion of the Chesapeake Bay. (Christman et al.)

**There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:17 p.m.**

**TCC DATA MANAGEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE  
MINUTES****Monday, March 17, 2003****Point Clear, Alabama**

**Chairman Page Campbell** called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. The following members and others were present:

**Members**

Joe O'Hop, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX  
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Joe Shepard, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Kevin Anson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Tom Van Devender, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Steven Atran, GMFMC, Tampa, FL

**Staff**

David Donaldson, FIN Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, Mississippi  
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, Mississippi  
Larry B. Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, Mississippi  
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, Mississippi  
Gregg Bray, RecFIN(SE) Programmer/Analyst, Ocean Springs, Mississippi  
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Survey Coordinator, Ocean Springs, Mississippi

**Others**

Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Jeff Jenner, NOAA/NCDDC, Stennis Space Center, MS  
Rick Leard, GMFMC, Tampa, FL  
Linda Lombardi-Carlson, NMFS, Panama City, FL  
Peter Hoar, NOAA/NCDDC, Stennis Space Center, MS  
Jill Jensen, GRN, New Orleans, LA  
Sallie Davis, GRN, New Orleans, LA  
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD

**Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was approved as written.

**Approval of Minutes**

The minutes for the meeting held on October 14, 2002 in Duck Key, Florida were approved as written.

## State/Federal Reports

Alabama - **K. Anson** reported that all quotas were met in 2002 for the MRFSS in Alabama. Approximately 65% of all fish seen were either weighed and/or measured. Due to bad weather and cold temperatures, the P/R quota was not met in Wave 1 of 2003. The participation of the economic add-on to the charter boat telephone survey is very good in Alabama. The biological sampling in Alabama is off to a slow start in 2003 due to the bad weather. All red snapper otoliths collected in 2002 have been aged and the rest of otoliths for the priority species should be aged by the end of March/first of April. Alabama will be conducting a Spanish mackerel survey to collect information about this fishery. The city of Orange Beach has banned the use of gill nets in their "waters" (which mainly impacts the Spanish mackerel fishery). The Division is using this survey to collect additional information to help refute the city's claims about gill nets. Independent gill net sampling continues in Alabama and continues to improve. The trip ticket program is operating smoothly. Currently, there are 12 dealers using the electronic trip ticket program. Law enforcement has had a bigger presence in the field, which has led to more timely and accurate reporting. The SEAMAP continues with no major problems. A derelict crab trap removal program was recently conducted in Alabama waters. Over 800 traps were removed in 2003 and another trap removal activity is scheduled for later this year (targeting deep water traps).

Florida - **J. O'Hop** reported that the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Florida Marine Research Institute (FMRI) conducts applied marine research in Florida's estuarine and nearshore environments. They have active programs in many areas of marine research, including red tide research and monitoring, seagrass research and restoration projects, fisheries research and monitoring, marine turtles and marine mammal research and monitoring, environmental assessment and monitoring projects, and support functions including a research library, specimen collections, and computer systems. The Fisheries Dependent Monitoring (FDM) group is assigned the tasks of the collection and analyses of commercial marine fisheries trip tickets, collection of information on saltwater fishing in Florida associated with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey (MRFSS), collection of angler catch and effort information and samples (fin clips) of red drum for Project Tampa Bay (an experimental assessment of stock enhancement releases and techniques), collection of log books and sampling of catches from head boats, and collection of biological samples from recreational anglers and commercial fishermen through the Fisheries Information Network (FIN), Trip Interview Program (TIP), and NMFS Beaufort Head Boat Survey. The collection and processing of marine fisheries trip tickets is operating normally, and **J. O'Hop** reported that the backlog of unprocessed trip tickets has been reduced to approximately 4 weeks. Florida has completed testing in early February on their trip ticket editing system and database after it was migrated to a Microsoft NT system and Oracle 9i. The migration and testing went better than expected, and they actually gained on the backlog despite the parallel testing. At this point in time, Florida is still receiving 2002 trip tickets from some of the dealers, but the amount of this late-reported data is starting to fall off. Also, a few of the dealers have begun submitting data using Southwest Computer

Bureau's trip ticket program, and several others have expressed an interest in seeing what the new trip ticket computer program will do. Angler catch and effort data collected by FDM staff for the MRFSS and Project Tampa Bay projects is proceeding normally. Florida collected over 51,000 angler interviews in 2002 for the MRFSS project (about 3,000 more interviews than collected during 2001 and almost 20,000 interviews over the base quotas for the project in Florida). Florida has experienced good cooperation with the charter boat captains for the Vessel Directory Telephone Survey (VDTS), and some are participating in the economic survey questions. All of Florida biologists associated with the MRFSS, Project Tampa Bay, TIP, FIN biological sampling, and head boat projects will be participating in our 6-month training on fish identification during March 25-26, 2003. Commercial catch and effort data collect for the TIP by Florida port agents is proceeding normally. The annual port agent meeting occurred on November 14-15, 2002, in St. Petersburg at FMRI. The port samplers got to see the new web-based TIP data entry program demonstrated. The next meeting is tentatively scheduled for the fall at the NMFS Southeast Fishery Science Center in Miami. The head boat project is also functioning normally, though there was some recent turnover in staffing at the Tequesta Lab. Florida has interviewed two biologists for this position, and will likely announce the hiring decision this week. The implementation of biological tissue sampling (primarily otoliths, but also fish muscle tissue for mercury analyses and DNA assays) has been received very positively by the samplers. Many have expressed to staff that they feel more like fishery biologists now instead of just staff who interview people and measure fish. With the increase in funding through FIN, Florida has increased the number of biological samples at least two-fold compared to 2001. Also, with the expansion of the collections to the Atlantic Coast of Florida and some very enthusiastic staff, the number of biological samples (lengths, otoliths, spines, fish tissues, fin clips, etc.) were obtained from over 7,000 specimens (including many snappers and groupers) in 2002. The additional length measurements that are taken during the course of sampling provided data for converting the various length types taken by different sampling programs. The regressions developed from these measurements aided the analysis of the yellowtail snapper Southeast Data Analysis and Review (SEDAR) meeting held recently in St. Petersburg at FMRI.

Mississippi - **T. Van Devender** reported that due to the bad weather, it has been difficult to reach the MRFSS targets for Wave 1. The Mississippi night survey has been completed and Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) and GSMFC personnel are currently analyzing the data to determine the differences between day and night fishing. The biological sampling activities are operating smoothly and personnel continue to collect commercial data through the TIP. The trip ticket system is still under development although data are being collected for oyster and bait shrimp. Work has begun on collected trip level data from hook and line fishermen. The legislative approval for a trip ticket program was never accomplished, however, MDMR is moving forward with the project. Mississippi also had a derelict crab trap removal program. A closed season was declared in Mississippi waters and approximately 1,500 traps were removed. The oyster season opened in October but due to all the rainfall, the landings are down from last year's total (260K vs. 410K). Most of the major reefs have been closed for about a month and with the additional

rain will probably remain closed for some time. Several barges and other materials have been placed in Mississippi waters to serve as artificial reefs. The outlook for shrimp season in Mississippi does not look good as in the other states. Due to the rain, the salinities in the marshes has dropped to zero which means most of the post larvae shrimp have been lost. Fishery-independent sampling, which began in 1973, continues and provides invaluable data. The sargassum project, being conducted by the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory (GCRL), continues to collect data about the flora and fauna around the large sargassum rafts found in the Gulf. In January, Mississippi began a jellyfish project where data are collected for all species of jellyfish encountered during sampling. Mississippi has produced a post-harvest treatment video for handling oysters to reduce vibro and types of pathogens.

Louisiana - **J. Shepard** reported that the shrimp landings in Louisiana are significantly lower in 2003 from past years (approximately 10 million pounds for brown and white shrimp). Due to the disastrous season, it appears that Congress will be providing some relief funds to Gulf shrimpers in 2003. Louisiana will be utilizing trip ticket data to parcel the funds to fishermen and dealers. The trip ticket program is going quite well. There are currently 63 dealers using the electronic reporting system and those dealers made up over 30% of the landings. **M. Kasprzak** reported that Louisiana exceeded quota in all modes/waves in 2002 for the MRFSS. In Wave 1 of 2003, Louisiana experienced the same problems everyone else did and had difficulty getting quota. The VDTS is running smoothly and Louisiana is preparing to conduct the annual economic add-on survey. Louisiana collected approximately 2800 otoliths in 2002 for the FIN biological sampling activity. All samples have been processed, read and analyzed and M. Kasprzak is in the process of sending the data to the FIN DMS. As with the MRFSS, the biological sampling is off to a slow start due to weather. Louisiana has developed a pamphlet regarding the biological sampling efforts. The brochure explains what the samplers are doing and why they are collecting the data. Hopefully, it will improve the cooperation of anglers.

Texas - **V. Swann** reported that Texas continues with their buy back program. The program began in 1995 and the goal is to reduce the fleet by 50 percent. With the latest round, approximately 28% of the fleet has been bought out. Letters were recently sent to fishermen notifying them about the next round of buy backs. The process takes about 3 or 4 months to complete. Texas recently conducted their second crab trap removal activity and collected about 4,000 traps. The next removal event needs to target specific areas that have not been focused on in the past removals. Texas is continuing to develop some spotted sea trout management scenarios. Currently, a proposal has been developed and is out for public comment. The proposal recommends that the 10 fish bag limit and 15-inch minimum size regulations remain in place. It also allows fishermen to keep one fish over 25 inches per day as well as establish a boat limit for guided trips. **P. Campbell** reported that Texas continues to collect otoliths under the FIN biological sampling program. The Texas charter boat survey is continuing although activity is currently very low since the charter boat industry in Texas does not operate much in the early part of the year.

**GMFMC - S. Atran** reported that since the last meeting, the red grouper stock assessment team have met and determined that the stock of red grouper are in much better shape than was first thought. However, the assessment did confirm that the stock is below the 80% threshold so the Council is still under that obligation to rebuild the stock. The Council is currently revising the red grouper FMP with various changes. On the recreational side, only two of the five allowed catch of grouper can be red grouper while on the commercial side, about a 6000-pound trip limit will be implemented as well as a reduction in shallow-water grouper quota. **S. Atran** noted that the Council just completed the first SEDAR meeting. It is a new procedure based on the NMFS Northeast Center's SAR/SARC process. It is first of a series of three meetings. The first is a data workshop to review the available data for the species of interest. The second meeting is a stock assessment workshop where the actual stock assessment is conducted. The third is a stock assessment review workshop to peer review the results of the assessment. The Council has requested stock assessments on scamp, black grouper and goliath grouper. The stock assessments on scamp and black have been deferred because scamp otoliths need to be processed and Florida may conduct a black group assessment in the near future. The focus was placed on goliath grouper; however, there is just not enough data on this species to conduct an assessment. Another species discussed at the SEDAR meeting was yellowtail snapper and an assessment will be conducted on this species. The Council has been working on Reef Fish Amendment 18 for a number of years. One item in this amendment relates to the use of a vessel monitoring system (VMS) on some of the vessels operating in the reef fish commercial fishery. In addition, it has been requested that staff explore the possibility of using electronic logbooks for these vessels. There have been some staff changes at the Council. Peter Hood is now working for NMFS-Southeast Regional Office and Timothy Goode has been hired as an economist to help with the social/economic aspects of the FMPs.

**NMFS - G. Davenport** reported that NMFS has migrated to Oracle 9i and because of this, there is some testing of the new TIP data entry system due to the upgrade. There were a series of issues identified by both in house and external users of the system and these issues should be resolved and the system on line and available to users by April 25<sup>th</sup>. The historical commercial landings are being migrated to the new system and should be completed by May 21<sup>st</sup>. NMFS is currently testing their review process program for Louisiana trip ticket data. This process will allow port samplers to review and compare the TIP data and trip ticket data and provide comments about these data. The system will be on-line for each of the port samplers. A similar process is in place for Florida trip ticket data and one will be established for Alabama trip ticket data. Regarding shrimp detailed effort data collection, approximately 640 have been conducted and efforts are underway to get all those data entered into the system. Some of the problems with this project included non-cooperation of fishermen as well as roadside sales of the product. The results of this data collection effort will be presented to the FIN Committee in June. TIP sampling continues to be on target. During the SEDAR process, one of the benefits is that it shows where data are lacking for the various areas in the Gulf of Mexico. The red snapper commercial fishery was closed on December 7<sup>th</sup> and reopened on February 1<sup>st</sup>. The king mackerel quota monitoring is ongoing and the quota for net fishery in the western Gulf was met and

the fishery was closed. The quota for the hook-and-line fishery for king mackerel in the southern zone of the eastern group may be met but it still remains open. A red drum sampling project was conducted where otoliths were collected from fish and a total of 1164 otoliths were obtained. The otoliths will be read and reports will be distributed to the various states about this activity. NMFS recently hired two new port samplers – one in New Smyrna Beach and one in St. Petersburg. Patrick Culp was hired as head of NMFS-SEFSC software management group. **D. Donaldson** noted that the GSMFC needs to be involved in the SEDAR process. Since the Commission is heavily involved in data collection in the Gulf of Mexico, they should participate in the data workshop meeting. **S. Atran** stated this was the first meeting of this process and the Council is still working out the details of the system. **S. Atran** stated that the GSMFC will be involved in future meetings. **G. Davenport** mentioned that one of the products from these meetings will be data recommendations regarding data gaps and needed information. **R. Lukens** stated that not only does FIN need to be involved in these meetings but also, the recommendations that result from these meetings regarding data needs have to be provided to FIN so the appropriate data collection activities can be conducted to address these data deficiencies.

GSMFC - **D. Donaldson** reported that the recreational activities continue to run smoothly and the states are still exceeding quota on routine basis. Regarding the commercial aspects of FIN, the trip tickets programs are running smoothly. The electronic trip ticket reporting system is continuing to grow. There are currently 75 dealers (63 in Louisiana; 12 in Alabama and several in Florida) utilizing the system. In addition, there are two shrimp dealers in Texas who are interested in using the system and state personnel are working with the Southwest Computer Bureau to get them up and running. The group will be discussing the status of biological sampling later in this meeting so it will not be discussed now. The FIN Data Management System is now accessible at FIN web page ([www.gsmfc.org/fin.html](http://www.gsmfc.org/fin.html)) and is operating smoothly. **D. Donaldson** introduced Donna Bellais, who is the new ComFIN Survey Coordinator. He noted that Mike Sestak has been called up into the Army and will be gone for as little as 3 months and for as long as 2 years. The priority is on maintaining the existing routines (commercial data loads; biological sample loads, etc.) The expansion of the system is currently on hold although staff will be attempting to get the biological data into system so it's accessible to users. Recently, an issue arose involving the AREA FISHED variable. Apparently, there were some area fished codes in the data that did not map to FIN area fished codes. Therefore, if someone ran a query broken down by AREA FISHED, all the landings would not be provided. This problem was identified and fixed, however, **D. Donaldson** wanted to make group aware of issue and let them know it has been resolved. The last issue presented by **D. Donaldson** referred to the Gulf Council outreach activity. After the notices about the outreach meetings have been distributed to the various fishermen, Tony Lamberte of the Gulf Council asked if the states would be willing to contact several fishermen about the meetings to gauge the level of participation. After some questions, the states agreed to contact some fishermen about the meetings.



## **Presentation of Mississippi Night Fishing Survey Results**

**G. Bray** stated that very little is known about night fishing activities in the Gulf of Mexico. The MRFSS survey collects primarily daytime dockside information and the assumption has been that catch information would be similar for night fishing but there is no data to prove this. Beginning in 2001 the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) began doing night interviews in order to address this topic. One of the goals of this survey were to determine if catch and harvest rates were similar between day and night fishing, and also to produce expanded estimates of catch and harvest using night survey data. From June to October 2000 the MDMR nightly sent samplers to shore sites to obtain pressure estimates. Approximately 12 sites were added that did not have day fishing activity but were used frequently at night. The GSMFC provided the MDMR with monthly sampling schedules. The MDMR used MRFSS sampling forms. Two samplers were sent out for each assignment for safety reasons. For 2001, **G. Bray** reported that the night survey observed 31 species and the day survey observed 15 species while in 2002, night survey observed 22 species and the day survey observed 29 species. The species selected for day and night fishing comparison were sheepshead, spotted seatrout, sand seatrout, southern kingfish, black drum, red drum, and southern flounder since most of these were important management species in Mississippi. **G. Bray** presented the day and night catch rates for the various species and the effects these rates had on total catch. Some of the conclusions reached were that more species were observed during night sampling; some differences in catch rates were observed between day and night fishing; overall differences in expanded estimates were not significant from a management standpoint; and research does not dismiss the importance of night fishing with respect for MRFSS estimates. **D. Donaldson** noted that G. Bray will be giving this presentation as well as a report to the FIN Committee in June.

## **Discussion of Head Boat Sampling in the Gulf of Mexico**

**D. Donaldson** reported that there had been a conference call scheduled for the end of February to discuss this issue; however, due to conflicts, the call had to be rescheduled for after this meeting. Therefore, there is not much information to discuss at this time. Once the call has been completed, the issues discussed will be presented to the FIN Committee in June. **D. Donaldson** outlined the approach for sampling head boats in the Gulf of Mexico. Beginning in Wave 3, the states will be contacting head boat operators, using the VDTS methodology, to compile effort data for head boats. This information will be compared with the log book data and from that, the most appropriate method for collecting data will be determined by FIN. In addition, Florida will attempt to conduct some at-sea sampling to collect catch data for head boats. Due to lack of funding, the other states will not be doing any at-sea sampling. **J. Shepard** asked why we would use a different method (at-sea sampling) for collecting catch data for head boats versus charter or guide boats. In order to accomplish this, a list of head boats (and thus a definition) needs to be developed. **J. Shepard** believed one method should be used for all for-hire boats, regardless of what they are called. **D. Donaldson** pointed out that at-sea sampling was being proposed because of the large number of passengers on head boats and the difficulty is collecting a representative sample of the

catch, both retained and discarded. After some discussion, it was noted that these issues would be talked about during the scheduled conference call and should be discussed at that time.

### **Discussion of Trip Ticket Reporting Issues Regarding Out-of-State Dealers**

**C. Denson** stated that there are several out-of-state dealers from Mississippi, Florida and Louisiana who conduct business in Alabama. In addition, there are fishermen who catch fish in Alabama waters but land the fish in another state. It was asked where should these dealers who receive fish report the data to – Alabama or the other state. There is a concern that these fish may get double counted if they are reported to both states. The purpose of this discussion is to provide a clear process to fishermen/dealers on who and where they should report their catches. The group discussed several scenarios where out-of-state dealers catch fish in one state and land them in another state. It was pointed out that if a dealer lands fish in one state, they need to be a licensed dealer in that state to legally land those fish. However, **C. Denson** noted that in Alabama, if the fish are not purchased but just get off loaded from the vessel, the fisherman or dealer do not legally have to report that catch under Alabama law. After some discussion, the group decided that staff will develop a white paper outlining the issue. It was pointed out that this issue has several parts: 1) law enforcement; 2) legislative changes, and 3) all five Gulf States having operating trip ticket programs. Staff will develop the document and distribute it to the Subcommittee. Then, the issue will be presented to the GSMFC Law Enforcement Committee as well as the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee at the October 2003 GSMFC meeting.

### **Status of Registration Tracking Module**

**D. Donaldson** stated that this issue has been discussed several times by this group as well as FIN. The minimum data elements have been developed for this module and a matrix was put together which outlined what each agency currently collects regarding the minimum data elements. There are some gaps in the minimum data elements and **D. Donaldson** stated that he wanted this group to discuss strategies for collecting all the needed elements by each agency. **J. Shepard** asked about the need for date of birth. **D. Donaldson** noted that that particular data element is the base for creating the unique identifier for fishermen and dealers. The Hull Identification Number (HIN) is the unique identifier for the vessel. Without the date of birth, the whole system that was developed by the Registration Tracking Work Group and approved by the FIN Committee, will not function properly. There was some concern among the states about the possibility of collecting date of birth. Since this issue will be discussed at the upcoming FIN Committee meeting, the group agreed that each agency needs to talk with the appropriate personnel about the feasibility of collecting date of birth through their licensing program. This information will help facilitate the discussion scheduled for the FIN meeting. To assist in these discussions, staff will distribute the registration tracking matrix to the various agencies prior to the FIN meeting.

## Status of Biological Sampling Activities

**D. Donaldson** distributed a summary of otolith collections for the recreational and commercial fisheries in 2002. The summary presents the number of otoliths that have been collected as well as the targets, by species, mode, and state. **D. Donaldson** noted that overall, the collection of otoliths and reaching the targets were fairly successful. Since this was the first year of collection, he believed the states did a good job of reaching the targets and as the process gets more routine there should be some improvement. It was noted that this was the first attempt at developing targets and some of the targets may not be reasonable. The work group needed to start somewhere and realized that there may need to be some adjustments made to the targets in subsequent years. For the first attempt, it was fairly successful. **D. Donaldson** stated that the states need to make sure they provide the tally information or actual collection data to the GSMFC on the established deadlines. This will allow staff to provide the states with feedback about the collection efforts and make modifications in efforts, as needed. He also mentioned that the states need to provide the collection and analysis data to the GSMFC as soon as possible. Although the biological module is not completely finished, staff will be putting these data into the FIN DMS so users may access it.

**D. Donaldson** discussed that there is a possible disconnect between the collection and processing of otoliths. The way the biological sampling process was designed was to collect and process otoliths for all of the FIN priority species (about 28 species). However, due to funding constraints, sampling is only occurring on five species. This causes a problem because the five species FIN is focusing on may or may not be species that have stock assessments scheduled in the next year. Therefore, it might be more useful to shelve the otoliths for species that are not scheduled for stock assessments and focus on processing otolith for species (not necessarily being funded by FIN) that are scheduled for stock assessment in the next several years. **R. Lukens** noted that by following this process, it potentially puts the states and the GSMFC in conflict with the FIN cooperative agreement since they will not be meeting their obligations (processing otoliths for the five species) outlined in the cooperative agreement. **L. Lombardi-Carlson** stated that by processing otoliths and then storing them until they are needed could potentially cause problems such as having to reread them when they're needed. This was the case with the recent yellowtail snapper assessment where several sets of the otoliths analyzed by one group had to be reread because the methods for analysis had changed. **D. Donaldson** pointed out there is a process under FIN, namely the otolith processors training workshops, which would prevent these types of things from occurring. These meetings get all personnel involved in processing otoliths together to compare reading techniques and discuss issues and problems regarding analysis of otoliths and other biological information. **G. Davenport** stated that, in this day and age of limited funding, the state and federal agencies need to utilize their funds to get the most out of available resources. Using these FIN funds to process the otoliths for species that will undergo stock assessments in the near future is the best use of those funds. **J. Shepard** pointed out that FIN has developed a process for biological sampling as they have for recreational and commercial catch and effort, bycatch, detailed effort, etc. **J. Shepard** believed that

FIN should stick with the designed plan and stay with the overall strategy. If FIN starts looking at short-term fixes, there is the potential to create some of the same problems that precipitated the design of FIN. In the long run, this system will work and time should be given to let it work. After a lengthy discussion, the group believed that this issue would not be resolved at this meeting and it needs to be further discussed by Data Collection Plan Work Group and the FIN Committee at their upcoming meetings. There are definitely two trains of thought on this issue and they both need to be further explored.

**Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:10 p.m.**

**TCC HABITAT SUBCOMMITTEE  
MINUTES - 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Spring Meeting  
Monday, March 17, 2003  
Point Clear, Alabama**

APPROVED BY:   
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Since the past Subcommittee chairman was no longer a Subcommittee member, **Jeff Rester** called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. and asked members and guests to introduce themselves. The following members and others were present:

**Members**

Frank Courtney, FFWCC, Port Manatee, FL  
Kevin Madley, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Steve Heath, ADCNR, Dauphin Island, AL  
Leslie Turney, ADEM, Mobile, AL  
Robert Adami, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX  
Heather Finley, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Paul Cook, LDWF, New Iberia, LA  
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS

**Staff**

Jeff Rester, Habitat/SEAMAP Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Cheryl Noble, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Columbus Brown, USFWS, Atlanta, FL  
Wendell Lorio, MSU, Stennis, MS  
Peter Hoar, NCDDC, Stennis, MS  
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD  
Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Paul Choucair, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX

**Election of Chairman**

**J. Rester** stated that since Dale Shively was replaced on the Subcommittee, the Subcommittee needed to elect a new chairman. Mark LaSalle was nominated to be chairman. By unanimous acclamation, M. LaSalle was elected as chairman. Unfortunately, M. LaSalle was not present at the meeting, and J. Rester stated that he would serve as facilitator for this meeting.

**Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was adopted without changes.

## **Adoption of Minutes**

The minutes of the March 18, 2002 meeting were adopted as written.

## **Administrative Report**

**J. Rester** stated that the contractor for the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's EFH EIS is still working on the document. The timeline for completion of the document has been revised several times, with a draft EIS being produced June 27, 2003. The Council's Technical Review Panel met in late October to review the second draft of the EFH EIS. **J. Rester** stated that he attended the ninth meeting of the Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force on December 10, 2002. As reported before, the Task Force drafted an action plan to address the hypoxia issue in January 2001. The purpose of the meeting was to review the progress of the various work groups that are under the direction of the Task Force. **J. Rester** reported that he had been working with the Commission's Derelict Trap Task Force to address the derelict crab trap problem in the Gulf of Mexico. The Derelict Trap Task Force recently submitted a proposal to NOAA's Community Based Restoration Program for funding for state trap removal programs. **J. Rester** stated that since the Subcommittee's last meeting, Texas, Alabama, and Mississippi held derelict trap removal days. Alabama held a removal day on June 15, 2002. Approximately 50 volunteers recovered a total of 323 traps. From January 21-25, 2003, the MDMR and the GCRL instituted a closed crabbing season and a derelict trap removal effort. Sponsors and volunteers removed a total of 1,429 abandoned crab traps from Mississippi's marine waters. Texas held a second removal effort on from February 15 through March 2, 2003 and 494 volunteers picked up approximately 3,858 abandoned crab traps. Alabama held a second derelict trap removal day this past weekend. **J. Rester** stated that all of these events were a huge success and hopefully the grant from NOAA will allow these efforts to continue in the future. **J. Rester** stated that thanks to funding from the USFWS, ninety thousand habitat posters were reprinted last year.

## **Overview of System for Classification of Habitats in Estuarine and Marine Environments (SCHEME)**

**K. Madley** stated that the development of this classification system originally arose from trying to map habitats in Florida. The purpose of the project is to allow scientists and managers to communicate with common and precise language. Different agencies throughout the state were using different mapping techniques. As an example, **K. Madley** stated that in Charlotte Harbor two water management districts meet and both have different ways of mapping seagrass because they are using different classification systems. He stated that they originally approached the Gulf of Mexico Program and they agreed to fund this project. This classification system is hierarchal in design and can be expanded to other states and also farther offshore. Four main habitat groups compose the highest classification. They are submerged aquatic vegetation, bare bottom, live bottom, and coral. While SCHEME was being developed, the researchers learned of a similar nationwide classification

system. They have contacted the researchers involved to make sure that both systems are compatible. **K. Madley** stated that SCHEME focused on the physical substrate and dominant life forms for classification.

### **Review of the Habitat Section of the Striped Bass FMP**

**J. Rester** stated that one function of the Subcommittee is the review of the habitat sections of all Commission FMPs. He stated that he distributed the habitat section of the Striped Bass FMP to everyone a few weeks prior to the meeting. **D. Frugé** added that the Striped Bass FMP was first adopted in 1986. He stated that this update contained a lot of new information not present in the first FMP. The Subcommittee next completed a page-by-page review of the habitat section. Several updates and corrections were provided. These were given to S. VanderKooy for inclusion in the next draft of the FMP. **S. VanderKooy** stated that the FMP should be completed and ready for the TCC's review next March.

Also, **S. VanderKooy** stated that the Commission was developing a new FMP for sheepshead. He requested a Habitat Subcommittee member to serve on the technical task force that would be developing the plan. P. Cook volunteered to serve as the Habitat Subcommittee representative on the technical task force.

### **Updating the Summary of Aquaculture Programs by State Document**

**J. Rester** reported that this document was originally produced in 1990 and updated three years ago. He stated that interest in the document has increased in the past year due to an increased interest in offshore aquaculture. He stated this was the reason he asked the Subcommittee to provide updated information to him. Each state was asked if they felt their state's section was accurate or needed updating. **S. Heath** stated that the information in the document concerning Alabama was accurate. **F. Courtney** presented an updated Florida aquaculture plan, updated contacts, and other updated Florida information. **R. Adami** provided a new list of species that were regulated under TPWD aquaculture rules. **P. Cook** provided updates for Louisiana and stated that Louisiana now requires a separate permit for tilapia aquaculture.

### **Habitat Video Discussion**

**J. Rester** reported that he had discussed the video idea with Bob Fairbank at Mississippi Power. B. Fairbank was supposed to attend the meeting, but was not present. **J. Rester** stated that Mississippi Power was interested in helping produce the video and could possibly donate footage and also video editing capabilities to the project. **J. Rester** stated that he would contact B. Fairbank and see where Mississippi Power stood with the project and also contact other agencies for funding help.

### **Habitat Issues of Interest From Each State**

**K. Madley** stated that a mechanical seagrass planter that had showed early promise to plant seagrass faster than hand planting is not working as well as originally

envisioned. He reported that FMRI is conducting a seagrass mapping project in Florida Bay. FMRI is also working with the Suwannee River Water Management District in mapping seagrass in the big bend area of Florida. Also, USFWS has donated money for aerial photography of Santa Rosa Sound for seagrass mapping. Finally, **K. Madley** stated that a seagrass manager's toolbox has been produced. It provides a list of best management practices to managers who want to restore seagrass.

**S. Heath** stated that the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program recently completed aerial photography for seagrass mapping in Mobile Bay. **L. Turney** stated that the contract did not include removing gridlines, so the data had to be sent back to remove the gridlines. **S. Heath** stated that other than dealing with the offshore aquaculture project, nothing of note is currently happening in Alabama.

**R. Adami** reported that sensitive habitat guidelines have been developed mainly for shrimp aquaculture. He stated that an essential shrimp habitat document has been created. It discusses important shrimp habitat in Texas. **R. Adami** stated that the recent Texas crab trap removal was very successful.

**H. Finley** reported that a bill has been submitted to the legislature for establishing a closed crab season. The closed season and derelict trap clean up would be rotated from bay system to bay system each year. **H. Finley** stated that a moratorium has been issued for oyster leases. This is due to conflicts with large freshwater diversions for coastal restoration. A comprehensive wetland restoration plan is still being developed. **H. Finley** stated that plans are being developed for two major hurricane protection levee projects. **P. Cook** stated that the Corps of Engineers has started a feasibility study for deepening the access channel to the Port of Iberia. Approximately 58 miles of channel will be dredged, producing 22 million cubic yards of dredged material. Agencies are working to discuss environmentally beneficial uses for the dredge spoil. **H. Finley** stated that the artificial reef program is currently under review, and there has been interest in toppling more oil and gas platforms in shallower water.

**D. Frugé** stated that the final rule for defining critical habitat for Gulf sturgeon would be published in two days. The rule would become effective thirty days after publication. He also reported that the National Wildlife Refuge system turned 100 years old last Friday. He stated that the Panama City and Daphne offices are involved in consultations with the states of Alabama, Florida, and Georgia concerning ACT-ACF river water allocation formulas.

### **Other Business**

**With no other business, the meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.**



APPROVED BY:   
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**TCC SEAMAP SUBCOMMITTEE  
MINUTES - 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Spring Meeting  
Tuesday, March 18, 2003  
Point Clear, Alabama**

**Chairman Jim Hanifen** called the meeting to order at 8:28 a.m. The following members and others were present:

**Members**

Jim Hanifen, *Chair*, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Richard Waller, USM/CMS/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
Paul Choucair, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX  
Steve Heath, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Steven Atran, GMFMC, Tampa, FL (*Proxy for Rick Leard*)  
Mark Leiby, FWC/FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Joanne Lyczkowski-Shultz, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS (*Proxy for Terry Henwood*)

**Staff**

Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Cheryl Noble, Staff Assistant, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Mark McDuff, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Jeff Jenner, NCDDC, SSC, MS  
Joe O'Hop, FWC/FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX  
Leslie Hartman, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Heather Warner-Finley, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Jill Jensen, GRN, New Orleans, LA  
David Hanisko, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Kirsten Larsen, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Karen Mitchell, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Robert Adami, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX  
Sallie Davis, GRN, New Orleans, LA

**Adoption of Agenda**

M. Leiby and D. Hanisko will discuss agenda item 8; P. Choucair will give an update on Mexico's long term monitoring program; and J. Jenner will give an update on NCDDC's SEAMAP activities. With these changes, the agenda was adopted.

### **Approval of Minutes**

**S. Heath** moved to approve the October 14, 2002 minutes. **J. Shultz** seconded the motion and the minutes were approved.

### **Administrative Report**

**J. Rester** reported the Fall Plankton Cruise and the Fall Groundfish Survey were completed last fall. Data from the groundfish survey will be used to produce the 5<sup>th</sup> annual red snapper real-time plots. These plots will only be available through the Commission's web site.

The SEAMAP 2003 Marine Directory was produced and distributed in February.

The EFH EIS contractor will not be using SEAMAP data for the mapping component of the EIS. The contractor underestimated the amount of work involved in putting the data in a GIS format.

SEAMAP will be producing real time shrimp data again this summer and **J. Rester** asked the members to please get their data in as soon as possible. **P. Choucair** has finalized the new real time data entry program and will distribute it to all members.

### **Fishery Independent Sampling in Alabama**

**L. Hartman** gave a presentation on Alabama's fishery independent sampling programs. A copy of the presentation can be obtained at the GSMFC office.

### **Status of the Shipboard Data Entry System and Database Compatibility**

**M. McDuff** reported they have used the FSCS data entry system for two cruises. He said they are pleased with the overall system and have provided the developers with a list of errors they found on the first two cruises. They now have an updated version and are checking it for errors. One of the biggest problems has been developing the protocol and training people to use the system. They hope to install the new system on the TOMMY MUNRO by the end of April and they will have training sessions this coming week. Several Subcommittee members and NMFS personnel met yesterday to discuss developing a new data entry system with Microsoft Access that can be used with the new FSCS system. **P. Choucair** will work with **M. McDuff** in developing this.

**M. McDuff** said that at the last joint SEAMAP meeting, the South Atlantic and Caribbean components suggested having a meeting to discuss where data management is going. They wanted to have the meeting in May, but decided to have it at this year's joint meeting. **M. McDuff** suggested the Gulf Data Coordinating Work Group have a conference call before the August meeting to decide what issues they want to discuss and if there is a need for any enhancements or developments of new tables, etc.

**M. McDuff** said they are spending a lot of time trying to set up the metadata protocols. He said the protocols are in the manual but the states may do something different than what is in the manual. He asked that each state send any of those differences to him so it can be incorporated into the manual as exceptions to the standard procedures.

**J. Rester** asked about a new program for entering the shrimp real time data. **M. McDuff** said a new program for the real time and atlas data has to be written to work with the new ORACLE structures so they are working on that. **P. Choucair** will send all the states the new program he uses for the Texas real time data. The Subcommittee discussed making changes to the Atlas since it will now be distributed on CD-ROM. **J. Rester** suggested having parts of it in color, maybe adding new tables, or the raw data to the CD-ROM. **J. Hanifen** asked **J. Rester** to contact the different work groups for suggestions and have all suggestions at the next meeting. The Subcommittee can then meet via conference call after the August meeting and discuss all changes or additions to the next Atlas.

#### **Update on Coordinated Fishery Independent Data Collection**

**D. Donaldson** reported that a conference call with the chairmen and coordinators of the three components was held to discuss the next steps in the process. Initially, the plan was to begin the actual development of the data modules utilizing existing material that is available, but the South Atlantic Board had some concerns about this new fishery independent initiative that it might impact existing ACCSP and FIN programs. Their main concern was the existing programs under SEAMAP could be ignored if additional money was found to start this new program. They feel if additional funding is obtained, the existing programs should be priority in getting them to where they would be if they have been level funded. They also said other programs are doing this type of coordination and SEAMAP should contact those groups before developing a new program. Because of these concerns, the group decided to develop a white paper outlining the program more clearly including the funding strategies. He said if they did get additional funding, one of the main goals would be to get existing programs back to where they were when they had full funding. He thinks the paper will be useful and will provide some guidance. It will be available and discussed at the joint meeting.

He then asked the Subcommittee to review the "Expanding SEAMAP Activities" section of the management plan to make sure it is still current. **J. Hanifen** asked the Subcommittee to send any changes to **J. Rester** before April 18 and they will be incorporated into that section of the management plan.

#### **Update on the SEAMAP Database Species Code Revisions**

**D. Hanisko** reported the ad hoc committee has developed a new coding system using the full taxonomic name. The entire classification is in the code. They have also developed new database structures to work with this. He said they have two new tables that will be integrated into the SEAMAP local database system. The first table

is the taxonomic code table and that contains a list of approximately 6,000 names and taxonomic descriptions. The second table is called the Taxonomic History Table and it will track changes to the taxonomic code. Both tables will be online to provide assistance when using the database. He said they are now in the process of testing and implementing the new system. He informed the Subcommittee that while they were developing this, they were informed that a group in DC are also working on integrating all the NMFS taxonomic databases into one common set and that will be available online to check with this new coding. They are having a meeting after this meeting to discuss final details of the revisions before testing.

**J. Jenner** asked if they are getting rid of the biocode completely. **M. Leiby** stated they were because there will no longer be a need for the biocodes, but it will be there through the transition.

### **Other Business**

**P. Choucair** reported that Mexico is still interested in developing a long term monitoring program that will be compatible with what is being used in the states. This was discussed extensively at a shrimp summit meeting last week and they are working toward that goal. He said he would like to provide them with a species list and help them set up shrimp statistical zones through Mexico. He said they have discussed several possibilities in helping Mexico get started but does not know if any will happen. One would be to have the OREGON II sample in Mexican waters, but he does not know how to get permission to do this. Another would be to use their research vessels with our assistance. He said their shrimp season closes in June and another option would be to loan them SEAMAP gear to do groundfish cruises with their commercial vessels. Also, the producers have suggested a self-imposed tax on every pound of shrimp to raise money for the research because they are sure the government will not provide enough funds for research.


At this point their priority is to set up a database that is compatible with the states and they want to learn how we analyze the data and what type of sampling procedures are used. The Subcommittee asked P. Choucair to continue working with the Mexican representatives and asked him to invite them to the meeting in Corpus Christi. He will keep the Subcommittee informed of their progress.

**J. Jenner** from NCDDC gave an update on their activities on accessing the SEAMAP database and linking it to all the data that is out there. He then went to the web page: [www.ncddc.noaa.gov](http://www.ncddc.noaa.gov) and demonstrated how to access the database. A complete copy of the presentation is available at the GSMFC office.

**J. Shultz** stated she is no longer the SEAMAP representative for NMFS and has been replaced by Terry Henwood. Scott Nichols will send a letter to the GSMFC office stating this. The Subcommittee thanked her for all her work over the years on the SEAMAP Subcommittee.

**There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:07 a.m.**

APPROVED BY:

  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE  
MINUTES - 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Spring Meeting  
Tuesday, March 18, 2003  
Point Clear, Alabama**

**Chairman Jeff Mayne** called the meeting to order at 8:25 a.m. The following were in attendance:

**Members**

Bruce Buckson, FWC/DLE, Tallahassee, FL  
Terry Bakker, MDMR Marine Patrol, Biloxi, MS  
J.T. Jenkins, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Richard Livingston, NOAA OLE, St. Petersburg, FL  
Jeff Mayne, *Chairman*, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Karen Raine, NOAA GCEL/SE, St. Petersburg, FL  
Tom Riley, USFWS, Atlanta, GA  
Don Montero, USCG 8<sup>th</sup> District, New Orleans, LA (*Proxy for John Sherlock*)  
Larry Young, *Vice Chairman*, TPWD, Austin, TX

**Staff**

Cindy Yocom, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Larry B. Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Lou Alesich, Motorola, Kenner, LA  
Walter Chataginer, Sr., MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Ronald Dearmin, NOAA OLE, Stennis Space Center, MS  
Ted Dietz, Motorola, Austin, TX  
Donnie Grace, USFWS LE, Mobile, AL  
Magda Hodge, NOAA OLE, St. Petersburg, FL  
James Kinnison, DEA, Washington, D.C.  
Rick Leard, GMFMC, Tampa, FL  
Richard McDonald, Motorola, Baton Rouge, LA  
Tom Shuler, NOAA OLE, Stennis Space Center, MS

**Adoption of Agenda**

**J. Mayne** suggested agenda item seven be moved up to item four. With this change, the agenda was approved by consensus.

**Approval of Minutes**

To allow for more time, **J. Mayne** requested that Committee members review the minutes on their own and deferred action to the next meeting.

### **IJF Program Activity**

**J.T. Jenkins** reported that progress is moving slowly since the group has had difficulty meeting with a quorum. The task force, with approval from the State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee, agreed to recategorize membership to assist in reaching a quorum for future meetings.

**J. Mayne** reported that development of the sheepshead fishery management plan will begin soon. [An organizational meeting has been tentatively scheduled during summer 2003]. Rotation for enforcement representation on task forces has moved to his state. Due to time constraints, he asked for a volunteer to act on his behalf; there were none.

### **Motorola Presentation**

**J. Mayne** introduced Lou Alesich, Ted Dietz, and Richard McDonald from Motorola, who presented information on hand-held personal computers that can eliminate paper forms for field officers. **L. Alesich** demonstrated the Symbol PPT 2800 using the vessel inspection boarding report used by all Gulf states. The Pocket PC is specifically designed for field use and has a rugged construction and will not be harmed by driving rain or dust. Peripherals for GPS input, magnetic scanning, and onsite printing are available. This PC would provide a convenience to field officers and provide error-free data assimilation. Data would be downloaded back at the office and sent to a central Oracle processor.

The Pocket PC platform offers a simple, fast user interface, extensive Internet browsing capabilities, and powerful overall performance, and the PPT 2800 Series transfers business activities, extending this familiar Windows-based platform from the traditional desktop setting to virtually anywhere. Symbol's rigorous quality requirements impart drop, sealing, and temperature specifications that are unmatched by other Pocket PC devices. The rugged durability achieved allows the device to withstand the wear and tear of everyday use in any business environment, from the office to field use. Conveniently placed scan triggers and the ergonomic design of the PPT 2800 enable simple one-handed data capture operation, and a high resolution 1/4 VGA display with responsive touch-screening technology further enhances the product's ease of use.

**D. Livingston** volunteered to further research the possibilities of the states using this system for JEA reporting requirements.

### **Homeland Security - The Drug Link to Terrorists**

**J. Mayne** introduced Jim Kinnison with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency. **J. Kinnison** reported that the information he presented is the most up-to-date, unclassified information on the war against drugs. Since most drug traffickers move a variety of substances, the DEA no longer targets activities of a specific drug; they target traffickers across the board. Drug threats are based upon three categories: the

volume of drug movement, levels of violence, and abuse indicators. Cocaine is still the largest problem in the U.S. Increased surveillance and enforcement resources in the Caribbean forced trafficking through Mexico and Central America. Chicago and Atlanta are key secondary-distribution hubs. Heroin trafficking has smaller distribution organizations than cocaine; however, heroin trafficking includes multiple courier organizations and routes. Methamphetamine was initially dominated by Outlaw Bikers, but a high-quality/low-priced Mexican methamphetamine expanded the market in the 1990s. There has been an increase in small toxic laboratories across the U.S. Methamphetamine laboratory seizures in 2002 included 441 labs in Texas, 15 labs in Louisiana, 138 labs in Mississippi, 136 labs in Alabama, and 28 labs in Florida. Marijuana has multiple suppliers, both domestic and internationally. Connections with large-scale drug traffickers has not been fully investigated. Often marijuana is used as a cash crop to finance other illegal ventures. Lax public attitudes, legalization initiatives, and high thresholds for federal prosecution pose significant challenges for enforcement. Ecstasy (MDMA) is perceived as a benign stimulant and has introduced new drug traffickers to the U.S. These organizations are often ethnically based and are involved in multiple criminal activities. Most MDMA is produced in Europe and smuggled into the U.S. via commercial air. Mexico is an emerging transit zone for European-produced MDMA. The Caribbean is another popular transit zone for this European-produced drug. Secondary distribution is known to occur in Texas and Florida. Ecstasy is promoted using youth-related symbols such as the Powder Puff Girls and Sesame Street's Elmo.

Critical U.S. vulnerabilities include its northern and southern borders, polydrug drug trafficking activities, methamphetamine labs and abuse, readily available heroin (particularly high-purity Colombian), the popularity of Ecstasy, lax public opinion, and decreased dedication of counterdrug assets. There are two similarities in drug trafficking and terrorism. Drug traffickers use terrorist-like tactics in their activities, and terrorists are known to benefit from the drug trade. The following groups have benefitted from drug trafficking:

- Abu Sayyaf Group
- Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA)
- Hizballah (Party of God)
- Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)
- Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK)
- Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)
- National Liberation Party (ELN)
- Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ)
- al-Qa'ida
- Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)
- Shining Path (Sedero Luminoso)
- United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC)

## **Joint Enforcement Agreements**

**D. Livingston** reported that NOAA OLE attempted to carry over funds from 2002 to 2003 and combine two years funding for the JEAs. The \$19 million carryover was subsequently reabsorbed into the general operating budget. This resulted in the loss of 2002 funding, and funding for 2003 was cut in half.

**L. Simpson** reported that he has made inquiries to Dr. Hogarth to investigate the loss of this funding. If the money was obligated and awarded, how were these funds subject to rescission?

**J. Mayne** asked what is being done to ensure that this does not happen again? **B. Buckson** asked if NOAA OLE really wanted the program to succeed? **D. Livingston** assured the Committee that JEAs are the region's number one priority. JEAs are the most exciting tool that enforcement has had to work with in recent history. The loss of this funding was not a policy decision within NOAA OLE.

**J. Mayne** opened discussion whether it might be better for another agency to administer the agreements so that this type mistake will not happen again. **D. Livingston** voiced his concern that enforcement activity may suffer and preferred that NOAA OLE administer the agreements.

**L. Simpson** noted that these agreements are cooperative agreements where all parties should be fully active in the process. Although administration of the funds by another agency may cost the program a minimal amount, the proper administration of agreements would certainly not cost \$19 million.

## **State Trip Ticket Systems Update**

No report.

## **State/Federal Reports**

**NOAA Office of Law Enforcement** - **D. Livingston** reported the agency has been more active at Commission and Council meetings, and he has seen positive changes in those arenas. The agency has become more involved in complex operations. For example, the vessel monitoring system will go into effect in May-June. The system will begin monitoring 200 vessels in the tuna fleet. In October, approximately 170 vessels from the rock shrimp fishery will be added to the system. The agency continues to assist in homeland security issues.

**NOAA General Counsel** - **K. Raine** distributed quarterly reports for 2002. Many of these cases came from the states, and she commended the states' good work. Discussion ensued on rock shrimp permits. **K. Raine** noted that there are many reasons for the permits, and they do help resolve cases. If a fisherman has an outstanding case with an overdue penalty, when he applies for his permit the pending



case must be resolved before a permit is issued. There is currently no summary settlement penalty schedule for the rock shrimp fishery.

**The remaining reports will be given during the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Meeting which will be held from 1:00 p.m. until 5:00 p.m. The meeting adjourned at 11:51 a.m.**

**S-FFMC MENHADEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
MINUTES - 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Spring Meeting  
Tuesday, March 18, 2003  
Point Clear, Alabama**

**Joe Smith**, by request of the Chairman, called the meeting to order at 8:41 a.m. with the following in attendance:

**Members**

Vince Guillory, LDWF, Bourg, LA  
Rick Schillaci, Omega Protein, Inc., Moss Point, MS  
Borden Wallace, Daybrook Fisheries, Inc., Empire, LA  
Joseph Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC  
Steve Heath, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL

**Staff**

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

**Others**

Sallie Davis, Gulf Restoration Network, New Orleans, LA  
Wendell Lorio, MSU, Stennis Space Center, MS  
Anne Lange, NOAA, Silver Spring, MD

**Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was unanimously approved.

**Approval of Minutes**

**B. Wallace** moved to approve the minutes from 10/16/02 as written, **V. Guillory** seconded and the minutes were approved.

**Membership Discussion**

It was reported by **B. Wallace** that the Menhaden Advisory Council for the Gulf of Mexico had been dissolved by action of Omega Protein and that Toby Gascon would no longer be a member of the advisory committee reducing the number of seats from 9 to 8.

**Forecast of 2003 Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Fishing Season**

**J. Smith** provided his annual forecast for the upcoming season and review of the past season to the group. **Smith** reported that Dr. Mike Prager was the new team leader

for the population dynamics team at Beaufort. Two new PhD's have been hired to further fill the team.

In 2002, **Smith** had predicted a year with 493,000mt of menhaden would be landed in the Gulf. The actual landings were around 576,000mt, an increase of 10% over the previous year and steady around the five-year mean. July saw the highest catches since 1994 and September was the lowest since 1998. In spite of a cold wet, windy spring with high turbidity and high river discharge and a colder than normal May, the industry reported good catches in June and July. September saw five named tropical systems enter the Gulf of Mexico which contributed to the low landings in that month. In 2002, 40 regular steamers, 2 run boats, and 1 bait boat fished with effort estimated at 386,700 vessel/ton/weeks.

The age composition favored age-1's east of the River and age-2's west; a few age-3's were taken at Cameron and Moss Point. In 2003, it is anticipated that 39 steamers, 2 run boats, and 1 bait boat will operate at the 4 plants in the Gulf. This would mean roughly 375,000 vessel/ton/weeks for these vessels and a total landing of 512,000mt.

**Smith** further reported that Doug Vaughan is anticipating running the Gulf stock assessment along side the Atlantic stock assessment which is being conducted through the SEDAR process (Southeast Data Assessment and Review). This framework lengthens the time it takes for Vaughan to complete the assessment but he has determined that it should free some time to work up the Gulf. Vaughan hopes to present some Gulf results at our next meeting in Corpus Christi, Texas.

### **Louisiana 2003 Forecast**

**V. Guillory** presented the Louisiana data modeling the 2003 forecast based on winter weather and recruitment. The 2002 January water temperatures were warmer than average, with a low Mississippi River discharge and associated rainfall resulting in higher than normal salinities around Grand Isle. Conditions would suggest the potential for lower recruitment in 2002. However, the LDWF juvenile abundance index is substantially higher than the long-term mean which is promising. Salinities have been average so far in 2003 and discharge is slowly increasing suggesting that oil yield may be good in 2003. A strong number of age-1's last year should result in a good showing of age-2's.

**B. Wallace** asked J. Smith to briefly discuss the Caenarvon River diversion and the apparent trend of more fish staying in the Sound longer as a result. **Smith** noted that Daybrook had historically left Bretton Sound by July but since the river diversion, fish remained all season in those waters. It appears that there are more fish east of the River in the last 10 years. This may provide a good biological argument for putting water back into the coastal marshes. It was also noted that after the Bonne Carre was opened in 1998, the 1999 fishing in Mississippi Sound was remarkable and the plants ran out of space for meal. **Smith** agreed to continue to investigate and watch this situation.

### **Revising CDFR Forms**

**J. Smith** discussed the current format of the CDFRs and suggested a few improvements to the form which might make the data more useful to managers. With the existence of GPS on all the boats, he proposed adding actual latitude and longitude to the form to get much more precise location data than had been collected previously.

**B. Wallace** suggested that the CDFRs could be incorporated into the Louisiana trip ticket format to eliminate the redundancy of multiple reporting forms. **Smith** agreed to talk to Joseph Shepard (LDWF) regarding the format and continue to work on this.

### **Atlantic Coast Update**

**J. Smith** updated the group on the 2002 season on the Atlantic. Atlantic landings in 2002 were 174,068 mt. This was down 25% from the previous year on the Atlantic. Atlantic landings in 2002 were also down 19% from the previous 5-year average, but considerably fewer boats are fishing now than 5 years ago (12 regular steamers). The season is much more staggered on the Atlantic starting in the Chesapeake and moving north off New Jersey later. Chesapeake closed around Thanksgiving and the North Carolina fishery opened in September, was slow in October and picked up again from December to mid-January of 2003. Approximately 57% of the total Atlantic catch in 2002 came from Chesapeake Bay.

### **Other Business**

**S. VanderKooy** updated the Committee on the Menhaden Website which is now accessible. The site has received a number of hits and several reporters and students have been directed to the site. The response has been very favorable.

**VanderKooy** updated the Committee on the continuation of the GSMFC initiative to key-enter the historic CDFRs. Temporary employees will be hired the first week of April and begin working on the 1984 dataset and end the effort with the 1991 dataset which, until recently, had been missing several vessels forms. This will make the complete CDFR set for the Gulf from 1984 to current available via computer.

It had been suggested at a previous meeting that Rocky Ward (TPWD) be invited to the fall meeting in Corpus Christi to present his genetics findings on regional menhaden populations. Staff will be sure that he is invited to present in October.

**With no further business the meeting adjourned at 11:05 a.m.**

**TECHNICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE  
MINUTES - 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Spring Meeting  
Tuesday, March 18, 2003  
Point Clear, Alabama**

**Chairman Corky Perret** called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. The following members and others were present:

**Members**

Steve Heath, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL  
Mike Ray, *GSMFC Commissioner*, TPWD, Austin, TX  
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Virginia Vail, *GSMFC Commissioner*, FWC, Tallahassee, FL  
Joe O'Hop, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Corky Perret, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Tom Van Devender, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
John Roussel, *GSMFC Commissioner*, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Joseph Shepard, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Tom McIlwain, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS  
Columbus Brown, USFWS, Atlanta, GA

**Staff**

Jeff Rester, Habitat/SEAMAP Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Bill Walker, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Harriet Perry, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
Bill Richardson, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Jim Hanifen, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Walter Blessey, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Biloxi, MS  
Paul Choucair, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX  
Robert Adami, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX  
Jill Jensen, Gulf Restoration Network, New Orleans, LA  
Sallie Davis, Gulf Restoration Network, New Orleans, LA  
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD  
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX

## Adoption of Agenda

**C. Perret** suggested adding the status of NOAA disaster relief funds for shrimpers under "Other Business." With that change, the agenda was adopted as written.

## Approval of Minutes

The minutes for the meeting held on October 15, 2002 in Duck Key, Florida were approved with one clarification under the Mississippi state report.

## State/Federal Reports

Florida - **V. Vail** stated that the Florida Legislature began its 2003 session on March 4. The Commission has proposed several statutory amendments relevant to marine fisheries management. They include a proposal to strengthen criminal penalties for conviction of selling or purchasing saltwater products without the required licenses, a proposal to standardize punishment for theft of and from traps in the blue crab, spiny lobster and stone crab fisheries, and a proposal to strengthen criminal penalties for certain net violations. **V. Vail** reported that the Commission would be meeting March 26 and 27, and they will be considering a draft rule for ballyhoo management that will establish a permit to use lampara nets as allowable gear for the harvest of ballyhoo along with commercial trip and vessel limits. The Commission will also draft rules to bring state regulations on swordfish and billfish into consistency with the federal regulations. **V. Vail** stated that the Commission recently held 3 workshops on a proposed rule that would facilitate removal of spiny lobster and stone crab traps from the water during closed seasons and their removal from prohibited areas within the Keys National Marine Sanctuary. Included in the proposed rule are definitions of debris and abandoned traps and authority for non-Commission employees to retrieve traps and debris under specified circumstances. **J. O'Hop** reported that the Fisheries Assessment Section of FMRI has completed several assessments of marine fish during 2002, including Florida pompano, common snook, silver mullet, halfbeaks, red drum, and sheepshead. In conjunction with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, FMRI hosted the yellowtail snapper Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review data workshop in early March 2003. **J. O'Hop** stated that the Governor's budget does not include funding for the Department of Agriculture and Consumers Services Division of Aquaculture. This could negatively affect Florida's aquaculture hard clam producers, shellfish harvesting in Florida's waters, and the potential for not allowing shellfish to be sold outside of Florida.

Alabama - **S. Heath** stated Barnett Lawley is the new Alabama Commissioner of Conservation. The 2003 activities calendar has been produced and distributed. **S. Heath** stated that several law enforcement personnel have been called for active duty in the military. Department personnel moderated meetings between oyster groups to decide if dredging should be allowed on Alabama oyster reefs. **S. Heath** reported that 2,000 tons of defective culverts were donated to the artificial reef program. He stated that these culverts function extremely well as artificial reefs. **S. Heath** stated that

Orange Beach outlawed commercial gillnetters from within a half-mile of the beach. Orange Beach did not have the legal authority to do this and Marine Resources Division is now working with Orange Beach and the gillnetters to resolve the issue. Finally, **S. Heath** stated that Alabama has begun working with NMFS to collect fish tissue for mercury sampling in Mobile Bay.

Mississippi - **T. Van Devender** reported that the Mississippi Legislature is currently in session, but there are not many bills that will affect the Department of Marine Resources. A two-year night fishing survey was recently completed. **T. Van Devender** stated that there was no statistical difference between the species caught at night and those caught during the day. Mississippi's first closed crabbing season was held in January to remove derelict crab traps from local waters. Sponsors and volunteers removed a total of 1,429 abandoned crab traps from Mississippi's marine waters. **T. Van Devender** stated that Mississippi's oyster season is currently underway and approximately 206,000 sacks have been harvested so far. Mississippi is continuing their artificial reef work with a barge being added to an offshore reef, and a new breakwater being created in Mississippi Sound from bridge rubble. **T. Van Devender** stated that the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory is conducting a survey on the barrier islands to look at jellyfish. Finally, **T. Van Devender** reported that he recently returned from a seafood trade show. Of note, he stated that 90% of the booths were for invertebrates. **C. Perret** added that he was proud to state that GSMFC Commissioner, Senator Billy Hewes was recently named "Conservationist of the Year" in Mississippi. Senator Hewes sponsored the bill that led to Mississippi's closed crabbing season for derelict trap removal.

Louisiana - **J. Shepard** reported the Louisiana artificial reef program is being evaluated. Public hearings will be held later in March. Currently the program contains 105 artificial reefs. **J. Shepard** stated that shrimp landings were down by 20 million pounds in 2002. This was mainly due to storms and cold fronts. Louisiana has instituted an oyster lease moratorium because of the conflict with coastal restoration projects. Current leaseholders will still be able to renew their leases, but no new leases will be allowed. The Louisiana legislature will begin their 2003 session April 1<sup>st</sup>. The Department of Wildlife and Fisheries will be trying to pass a derelict crab trap law that would establish two closed seasons. The first closed season would be for sixteen days between February 1 and March 30. Another closed season would take place during the beginning of shrimp season. The closed season would be rotated each year to a different bay system.

Texas - **M. Ray** stated that TPWD is examining menhaden genetics throughout the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic. DNA from menhaden fin clip samples has been screened to determine differences throughout the Gulf. **M. Ray** stated that TPWD's Aquaculture Outreach and Inspection Team completed approximately 1,800 inspections last year. One hundred percent compliance has been achieved with water discharge procedures and no viral diseases have been found this year. The artificial reef program received nine oil and gas platform donations since last October. The eleventh round of shrimp license buybacks was held, and approximately 90 licenses were purchased with an average price of \$7,100. To date, 905 bay and bait shrimping

licenses have been purchased for \$5 million. Six commercial crab licenses were purchased during the third round of the buyback program for an average of \$5,100. A total of 22 licenses have been retired for \$96,000. The second finfish license buyback retired 33 licenses for an average price of \$4,400. Forty-six licenses have been retired so far at a cost of \$200,000. From February 15 through March 2, approximately 3,900 derelict traps were picked up during the second Texas abandoned crab trap retrieval period. Following a review of biological data, **M. Ray** stated that TPWD is advocating regulation changes related to spotted seatrout management. The new regulation would not affect bag or size limits, but would only allow one trout over 25 inches in length per day. A current legislative bill would modify the law regulating the Texas crab trap closure. The bill would designate traps as litter the first day of the closed season and allow anyone to remove them as soon as the closed season began. **M. Ray** reported that Texas now has a new legislative representative to the Commission. He is Representative Gene Seaman from Corpus Christi.

NOAA Fisheries - **T. McIlwain** reported that Sea Grant recently hosted a shrimp summit in Houston. At this meeting, disaster relief for shrimpers was discussed. **T. McIlwain** stated that this issue would be discussed further under "Other Business." **T. McIlwain** reported that a new bycatch plan is available for review. NOAA Fisheries has published a code of conduct for responsible aquaculture in the EEZ. **T. McIlwain** stated that more funding has been provided for better fisheries stock assessment work. The Saltonstall-Kennedy grant program has been amended to allow researchers to address fishing communities. The budget for the red snapper research program was recently cut. Finally, **T. McIlwain** reported that a new red snapper stock assessment would be undertaken in 2004.

USFWS - **C. Brown** reported that the final rule designating critical habitat for the Gulf sturgeon is expected to be published in the *Federal Register* March 19. The regulations will become effective 30 days following publication. In the FWS Washington headquarters office, Dr. Mamie Parker, who is currently the Regional Director of the Northeast Region will be replacing Cathy Short as Assistant Director for Fisheries, who is retiring later this month. The FWS held its first ever meeting of all Fisheries Program field office supervisors nationwide during the week of January 20 in Washington, DC. Over 500 people attended the meeting, about a fifth were from outside the FWS. The effort to develop an aquatic resources partnership for the Southeast between state and federal inland and marine fisheries agencies and organizations continues to move forward. At a meeting held in Nashville, Tennessee on February 19 and 20 goals and objectives of the partnership were further developed, and work groups were established to further develop these for specific focus areas. The six focus areas are public use, mitigation, imperiled resources, interjurisdictional fisheries, habitat and aquatic nuisance species. **C. Brown** reported that the FWS Panama City Field Office has been consulting with the Pensacola Naval Air Station regarding potential disorientation effects on hatchling sea turtles from a proposed new lighting system to be installed. The FWS is undertaking a study on methylmercury and other contaminants in fish and wildlife in Mobile Bay similar to studies that have been done in other bay systems of the Gulf. Last Friday marked the centennial of establishing the National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) system. **C. Brown** stated the FWS



would like to express appreciation for the support and recognition the Commission gave to the NWR system in the resolution it put forth earlier this year in recognition of the centennial.

### **Creel Survey of Sportfish at Cat Island, Mississippi**

**W. Lorio** presented the work he completed on sportfishing around Cat Island, Mississippi. The study used the same procedures that were used in a 1977-1979 study. The second study took place from 1997 to 1999. The goal of the study was to determine if sportfishing had increased around the island since the study was first completed. The study found that most fishing around the island occurred from Easter through Labor Day. Most of the anglers surveyed during the study were from Mississippi. The study determined that fishing effort has significantly increased around the island in the past twenty years.

### **Report on Mississippi's Derelict Crab Trap Program**

**H. Perry** reported on the recent derelict crab trap recovery that Mississippi held. She also discussed the recent Alabama and Texas removal efforts. She stated that in two years, Texas has removed approximately 12,000 traps from their marine waters. Alabama first held a trap clean up last June and picked up around 300 traps. Alabama's second clean up was this past Saturday and over 1,100 traps were removed. Due to a legislative change, MDMR was able to close the commercial crabbing season from January 21-25, 2003 to remove derelict traps from the water. The Mississippi effort was a joint initiative between the MDMR and the GCRL. Sponsors and volunteers removed a total of 1,429 abandoned crab traps from Mississippi's marine waters during the closed season. **H. Perry** discussed the data that they gathered on bycatch within the traps. She stated that sheepshead were the most common fish caught in the traps. **H. Perry** also stated that the Derelict Trap Task Force has submitted a proposal to the NOAA Community Based Restoration Program for derelict trap removal funding.

### **Status of Oyster Populations in the Gulf of Mexico**

**C. Perret** stated that he originally prepared this presentation for a Maryland Sea Grant oyster symposium. Unfortunately the symposium was cancelled due to a snowstorm, so he stated that the TCC would be first audience to see this presentation. **C. Perret** stated that in 2001 the Gulf of Mexico produced 71% of the total oysters in the United States. Louisiana leads the Gulf of Mexico in terms of oyster production. **C. Perret** next discussed the different monitoring programs the states had for monitoring the status and health of oysters. He also reported on the status of public and private reefs within the states.

### **Presentation of the Otolith Manual**

**S. VanderKooy** distributed the compact disc version of the draft otolith manual. He stated that he wanted to give the TCC time to review the document before approving

it. He stated that the manual covers the aging of several species of fish using any hard parts that produce annual rings. **S. VanderKooy** reported that there was considerable interest in this project from the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. **S. VanderKooy** stated that this would be a living document and they would be adding species to it in the near future. **S. VanderKooy** asked the TCC to review the document for two months and send any comments to him. He would then summarize changes and send the TCC another copy for their approval.

### **Subcommittee Reports**

**Anadromous** – **D. Frugé** stated that the Anadromous Fish Subcommittee has not met since the March 2001 GSMFC meeting, but has been meeting regularly as the core of the Striped Bass Technical Task Force (TTF), which is working on revising the Striped Bass FMP. He reported that the TTF has met 7 times since January 2001. The three meetings last year were without quorums, but work sessions for review and editing of the draft document were productive. **D. Frugé** stated that in order to help achieve quorums at meetings the State-Federal Fishery Management Committee recently approved the status of three individuals being changed from “voting members” to “others”. These three individuals had never attended a meeting, and the change retains them on the mailing list for meeting notices, new drafts and other information, but they are not considered in determining a quorum to conduct meeting business. **D. Frugé** reported that the Striped Bass FMP would probably be ready for the TCC to review at the spring 2004 meeting. **D. Frugé** reported that although the goals and objectives sections are not yet complete the TTF is moving in the direction of developing individual goals for striped bass populations in specific river drainages, which is different from the way this is handled in the current version of the striped Bass FMP and other Commission FMPs.

**Crab** – **H. Perry** reported that the Crab Subcommittee had one action item for consideration. This item dealt with the reclassification of the blue crab fishery in relation to marine mammals. **H. Perry** stated that the Crab Subcommittee passed a motion that the Crab Subcommittee, through the Derelict Trap Task Force, be involved throughout the development of the strategic plan for education and outreach to all user groups to address dolphin interactions. The Crab Subcommittee was now looking for approval from the TCC to continue working with Sea Grant and NOAA Fisheries on the strategic plan. **J. Shepard motioned to accept the Crab Subcommittee’s action item. S. Heath seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.**

**SEAMAP** – **J. Hanifen** stated that all SEAMAP activities were completed as scheduled last fall. Leslie Hartman made a presentation on Alabama’s fishery independent sampling program to the Subcommittee. Mark McDuff updated the Subcommittee on the SEAMAP database and the shipboard computer system that was installed on NOAA’s vessels last year. M. McDuff stated that all issues regarding importation of data into the SEAMAP database from the shipboard computer system have been fixed. Richard Waller stated that the R/V Tommy Munro would soon be outfitted with a similar shipboard computer system. Finally, the Subcommittee

discussed inviting Mexican biologists to participate in the October SEAMAP meeting. This would be in an effort to help Mexico standardize their new sampling program using SEAMAP protocols.

Data Management – **P. Campbell** stated that Gregg Bray made a presentation on the Mississippi night fishing survey results to the Subcommittee. The Subcommittee also discussed head boat sampling in the Gulf. The Subcommittee discussed ways to handle trip ticket reporting for out of state seafood dealers. **P. Campbell** reported that the Subcommittee discussed otolith processing and reviewed targets for biological sampling. Approximately 15,000 samples were collected last year.

Artificial Reef – **R. Lukens** reported that the Artificial Reef Guidelines document is in draft form. The Subcommittee should finalize the document at their next meeting in April. **R. Lukens** stated that NOAA Fisheries is still reviewing the National Artificial Reef Plan that the Subcommittee submitted to them a few years ago. **R. Lukens** stated that the Plan is still in internal review. The Subcommittee requested permission to write a letter to NOAA Fisheries to take action on the Plan if action is not undertaken soon. By unanimous acclamation, permission was granted to do so when the Subcommittee felt it was necessary. **R. Lukens** stated that retired vessels are being made available for deployment as artificial reefs. Money has also been provided for cleaning the vessels, but the Subcommittee wants the vessels cleaned before they are delivered to the states.

Habitat – **J. Rester** reported that the Subcommittee discussed a new habitat classification scheme developed in Florida. This scheme was developed by Kevin Madley of FMRI, and has potential to be used around the Gulf of Mexico. **J. Rester** stated that the Subcommittee reviewed the habitat section of the Striped Bass FMP and provided comments to S. VanderKooy for inclusion. The Subcommittee is in the process of updating the Summary of Aquaculture Programs by State document that was last updated over three years ago. **J. Rester** reported that the Subcommittee also discussed producing a habitat video for outreach purposes. Finally, the Subcommittee's last chairman was reassigned to another Subcommittee, so a new chairman was elected. Mr. Mark LaSalle was elected as chairman.

### Other Business

**C. Perret** wanted to discuss the \$35 million in Title 5 disaster funds for the shrimping industry. Half of this money would be distributed in the Gulf of Mexico and **C. Perret** wanted to know how and when this money would be distributed. **T. McIlwain** stated that he was not able to give a definite answer on these questions at this time. He stated that he had left a message for Bill Hogarth and was waiting for him to reply.

**C. Perret** stated that his agency and probably the other states had not distributed money in this way before. He was concerned that rules and regulations for distributing the money were not already in place. **V. Vail** stated that Florida has dealt with this in the past when distributing funds to trap fishermen to compensate for uninsurable trap losses due to hurricanes. She stated that Florida hired a contractor

to receive claims and distribute funds. **V. Vail** stated that this took the burden off the state agency.

**J. Roussel** asked who would be eligible to distribute the funds. He wanted to make sure that the marine resource agency would be the agency that oversees distribution. **C. Perret** recommended that all agencies remain in contact on this issue.

**With no other business the meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.**

**STATE-FEDERAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**  
**MINUTES - 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Spring Meeting**  
**Wednesday, March 19, 2003**  
**Point Clear, Alabama**

**Facilitator Larry Simpson** called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. The following members and others were present:

**Members**

Columbus Brown, USFWS, Atlanta, GA  
Tom McIlwain, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Vernon Minton, *GSMFC Commissioner*, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Corky Perret, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Mike Ray, *GSMFC Commissioner*, TPWD, Austin, TX  
John Roussel, *GSMFC Commissioner*, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Larry Simpson, *GSMFC*, Ocean Springs, MS  
Virginia Vail, *GSMFC Commissioner*, FFWCC, Tallahassee, FL

**Staff**

Donna Bellais, ComFIN Survey Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ginny Herring, Administrative Officer, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jason Keenum, Accountant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Pat Daughdrill, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve Heath, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Billy Hewes, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Mississippi Senate, Gulfport, MS  
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD  
Wendell Lorio, MSU, Stennis Space Center, MS  
Harriet Perry, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
William Walker, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Bob Zales II, Panama City, Florida

**Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was adopted as amended.

### **Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on October 16, 2002 in Duck Key, Florida were approved as presented.

### **USFWS National Fisheries Leadership Conference**

**C. Brown** of USFWS gave a presentation on the National Fisheries Leadership Conference held in January 2003. There were over 500 people in attendance, including the Secretary of Interior. Some of the highlights of this conference include working with partners to maintain aquatic resources, becoming better partners to resources and people, the establishment of a national support group, doing more work with endangered species, partnering more with Fishery Management Councils, expanding recreational fishing outreach activities, cooperating with Native Americans, expanding work with increasing emphasis on habitat, and identifying staff needs and training. **Brown** noted that the next National Fisheries Leadership Conference will be held in Nashville, Tennessee on July 22 and 23.

### **Derelict Trap Programs in the Gulf of Mexico**

**H. Perry** of the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory reported that three states in the Gulf of Mexico region have instituted derelict trap removal programs, Texas, Alabama, and Mississippi. In the first year of their program Texas removed over 8,000 traps, Alabama removed over 1,500 traps, and Mississippi removed 2,200 traps. The Mississippi program was funded in part by the Coastal Impact Assistance Program. The Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, working with staff from the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory and volunteers, also collected detailed bycatch data. **Perry** noted that the Crab Subcommittee with the Habitat Subcommittee submitted to the NOAA Grants Habitat Program a proposal to do a regional coordinated trap removal program in the five Gulf states. She will keep the Committee informed on the progress of this proposal. **C. Perret** noted that State Senator Billy Hewes was named Mississippi Wildlife Federation Conservationist of the Year based in part on his authorship of the derelict trap removal legislation.

### **Menhaden Advisory Committee Report**

**S. VanderKooy** delivered the Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC) report noting that the advisory committee met with 5 of its 9 members present. Toby Gascon will no longer be a member of the advisory committee thereby reducing the number of seats from 9 to 8. It was reported that the Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Council had been dissolved by action of Omega Protein. Menhaden landings were around 576,000mt in 2002, an increase of 10% over the previous year. Forty regular steamers, 2 run boats, and 1 bait boat fished in 2002. In 2003, it is anticipated that 39 steamers, 2 run boats, and 1 bait boat will operate at the 4 plants in the Gulf. **VanderKooy** reported that Doug Vaughan of NMFS is anticipating running the Gulf stock assessment alongside the Atlantic stock assessment which is being conducted through the SEDAR process (Southeast Data Assessment and Review). Vaughan hopes to present some

results at our next meeting in Corpus Christi in October. **VanderKooy** noted that J. Smith of NMFS suggested some improvements to the CDFR forms by adding actual lat and long to the form to get more precise location data. It was also suggested that the CDFRs could be incorporated into the Louisiana trip ticket format to eliminate the redundancy of multiple reporting forms. **VanderKooy** updated the Committee on both the menhaden website, which is now accessible, and the continuation of the GSMFC initiative to key-enter the historic CDFRs. This will make the complete CDFR set for the Gulf from 1984 to current. It was suggested that Rocky Ward (TPWD) be invited to the fall meeting in Corpus Christi to present his genetics findings on regional menhaden populations.

### **Commercial/Recreational Fishery Advisory Panel**

**S. VanderKooy** gave the Commercial/Recreational Fishery Advisory Panel (CRFAP) report noting that a quorum had been met for both sectors. **VanderKooy** reported that D. Donaldson of GSMFC gave a presentation on the latest activities of the FIN Data Program and demonstrated the online data management query tools. Donaldson explained how to access the data, the type of data available, and who would be able to utilize this system. During discussions following this presentation, many concerns were voiced regarding the trip ticket system. Donaldson suggested that since there were these issues, the state coordinators for the trip ticket system would be invited to a discussion session at the October meeting in Corpus Christi. **VanderKooy** reported that B. Zales brought to the attention of the Panel some problems associated with a recent socio-economic study of the charter boat industry. **VanderKooy** then reported that H. Perry of the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory presented a report on the derelict trap recovery efforts in the Gulf of Mexico, and R. Lukens spoke to the Panel on recent activities dealing with methylmercury and invasive species.

### **Status of IJF Fishery Management Plans and Other IJF Activities**

**S. VanderKooy** provided Committee members with a summary of the activities of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries (IJF) Program. **VanderKooy** reported on the derelict trap guidance document. He noted that a couple of years ago the Crab Subcommittee and staff had been directed to form a derelict trap task force in order to identify problems and to assemble a guidebook. This document has gone through the review process and it will now go out for a 30 day public comment period. At the end of the public comment period, any comments made will be summarized for this Committee.

**VanderKooy** noted that he has been working with the NOAA Office of Protected Species on the blue crab trap and marine mammal interactions. NOAA had considered reclassifying the blue crab fishery from a category 3 to a category 2 due to interactions.

**VanderKooy** reported that the Otolith Manual was given to the Technical Coordinating Committee for their review. Comments so far have been very favorable and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) has shown interest and a draft has been provided to them for their review. The ASMFC has indicated that

they want to incorporate the Otolith Manual into their standard procedures for age and growth.

**VanderKooy** reported that the striped bass FMP revision continues to make steady progress with most sections drafted and final editing should take place this fall.

**VanderKooy** reported that the review of out of print and out of date FMP's has been completed. The task forces for oyster, black drum, and striped mullet have been reactivated and the consensus is that these FMP's are in need of revision. The shrimp task force is also being formed in order to evaluate the need for an near shore state water shrimp FMP.

**VanderKooy** reported that the sheepshead task force is currently being identified, noting that historically membership on a task force was made up of commercial, recreational, law enforcement, habitat and other disciplines as necessary. In the past it was a staff function to contact the committee members and ask who would represent these various groups. Now that the CRFAP has been re-activated those members were surveyed to determine if they would like to serve on the task force or if they have any recommendations. The CRFAP has two nominations, Mike Bracken, a charter boat captain from Biloxi, and Simon Zirlott, a commercial fisherman from Mobile. **VanderKooy** requested that this Committee approve these two individuals or select others, and asked for clarification on the method to name task force members in the future. **L. Simpson** noted that historically a task force is comprised of a recreational member, a commercial member, a law enforcement member, a habitat member, a socio-economic member, a state member, and the option of adding others with particular expertise as needed. After lengthy discussion, the Committee agreed to continue having these sectors represented on technical task forces. Committee discussion continued regarding charter boat, dealer, and environmental representation on technical task forces and it was agreed that membership should be decided on a fishery by fishery basis. Also, in the future state directors will be contacted for their input regarding recreational and commercial membership on a task force. The S/FFMC will decide who will serve on a technical task force via conference call or e-mail ballot. **C. Perret moved to include M. Bracken and S. Zirlott on the sheepshead technical task force. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.** **J. Roussel** will check if anyone in Louisiana would like to serve on the sheepshead technical task force.

Since Mark LaSalle was unable to attend this meeting, **S. VanderKooy** gave a presentation on recent activity with marine mammals and the blue crab fishery reclassification noting that assuming outreach will be conducted on behalf of NOAA, Sea Grant, and the Crab Subcommittee it will not be necessary to elevate the blue crab fishery. **VanderKooy**, who has been working with Louisiana Sea Grant and the NOAA Marine Mammal group from St. Petersburg, Florida, gave a brief history of marine mammal interactions in the Gulf of Mexico. In order to be proactive, the Work Group is encouraging outreach and education for fishery participants on ways to reduce dolphin interactions and also to look at a more holistic approach rather than target this one fishery. NOAA has agreed to work with the GSMFC and Sea Grant to educate fishery participants on ways to reduce dolphin interactions. **VanderKooy**



reported that the following motion by the Crab Subcommittee was forwarded to the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) and it is now being presented to the S/FFMC: **The Crab Subcommittee requests, through the derelict trap task force (which includes members from the Law Enforcement Committee, C/RFAP, Habitat Subcommittee, and members of Sea Grant) that it be involved throughout the development of the strategic plan for education and outreach to address all user groups regarding dolphin interactions.** VanderKooy explained that what Sea Grant needs is an endorsement of the principle of this outreach and education initiative and requested that this issue be forwarded to the Commission. There was some discussion on the use of the word "assessment" in the Sea Grant presentation and this will be clarified with M. LaSalle. The S/FFMC agreed to endorse the activities of this group redirecting education effort to all user groups rather than just crabbers.

### **FIN Data Program Update**

**D. Donaldson** reported that the Fisheries Information Network (FIN) program for 2003 is operating with a \$4.2 million budget.

**Donaldson** distributed information to Committee members on indirect costs and noted that a conference call was held in February 2003 to discuss this subject. **Donaldson** noted that Louisiana probably will have an indirect cost rate and wants to be proactive in establishing a standard for indirect costs. At this time Florida is the only state using indirect cost under the FIN program. The Committee discussed indirect costs and agreed that although it is a percentage of total direct cost, it should be flexible and subject to review annually. **M. Ray moved that indirect costs for the FIN Program be capped at 25% of salaries, wages, and benefits. J. Roussel offered an amendment to this motion: for a period of time beginning with Commission approval until March 15, 2004. The motion and amendment were seconded and passed with National Marine Fisheries Service abstaining.**

### **Habitat Program Report**

**J. Rester** provided a report on the Habitat Program noting that he has been involved with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC) Essential Fish Habitat Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). A draft EIS is due to be released to the public on June 27, 2003. **Rester** reported that in late October the Technical Review Panel of the GMFMC met to review the second draft of the EIS. This group will meet again in June.

In December **Rester** attended a meeting of the Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force. The Task Force drafted an action plan in 2001 to address the hypoxia issue and one of the goals of this plan is to reduce the extent of the hypoxic zone to less than 5,000 square kilometers by 2015.

**Rester** reported that he had been involved with the GSMFC derelict trap task force. The task force has submitted a grant to the NOAA community based restoration

program and hopefully there will be information forthcoming regarding funding in early June.

**Rester** noted that he continues to work on the annotated bibliography of fishing impacts on habitat. It is still being updated and currently contains over 700 citations.

**C. Perret** suggested that **J. Rester** take National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) training when it is offered in the future.

### **Other Business**

**Shrimp Disaster Funds** - **L. Simpson** stated that \$17.5 million has been appropriated for the shrimp fishery in the Gulf of Mexico and noted that several meetings and conference calls have been held concerning this issue to assure that this money goes to the right people. **V. Vail** reported that her staff has been in contact with **R. Crabtree** and shrimping organizations and it has been reported that the Gulf and South Atlantic Development Foundation has indicated an interest in coordinating the distribution of \$35 million in shrimp disaster funds for the Gulf to the Southeast. **T. McIlwain** noted that the Congressional Affairs Office in Washington, DC is working with Congress in an attempt to determine how these funds will be distributed and no decisions have been made at this time. Since definitive information is not available, **J. Roussel** requested that NMFS distribute information on the shrimp disaster funds in the form of a news release or similar format. The Committee discussed various problems associated with the distribution of shrimp disaster funds. **T. McIlwain** assured the Committee that all the discussions at this meeting would be communicated to **R. Crabtree**. **C. Perret** suggested that **L. Simpson** contact **W. Hogarth** or **R. Crabtree** for information and then have a conference call with the S/FFMC.

**There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:15 p.m.**

*Mike Ray*

**COMMISSION BUSINESS MEETING  
MINUTES - 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Spring Meeting  
Wednesday, March 19, 2003  
Point Clear, Alabama**

**Chairman Mike Ray** called the meeting to order at 1:20 p.m and invited the Commissioners to introduce themselves.

**L. Simpson** noted that a quorum was present and reviewed pertinent rules and regulations regarding voting procedures.

The following Commissioners and/or proxies were present:

**Commissioners**

Vernon Minton, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL (*Proxy for Barnett Lawley*)  
Chris Nelson, Bon Secour Fisheries, Bon Secour, AL  
Mike Ray, TPWD, Austin, TX (*Proxy for Robert L. Cook*)  
Walter J. Blessey, IV, GSMFC, Biloxi, MS  
Corky Perret, MDMF, Biloxi, MS (*Proxy for William Walker*)  
Billy Hewes, Mississippi Senate, Gulfport, MS  
John Roussel, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA (*Proxy for James H. Jenkins*)  
Virginia Vail, FL FWC, Tallahassee, FL (*Proxy for Ken Haddad*)  
William Ward, GSMFC, Tampa, FL

**Staff**

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ginny Herring, Administrative Officer, Ocean Springs, MS  
Nancy Marcellus, Administrative Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jason S. Keenum, Staff Accountant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Survey Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Gayle Jones, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Tom McIlwain, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS  
Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD  
Walter M. Tatum, Foley, AL  
John Thomas Jenkins, AMR, Dauphin Island, AL

## **Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was approved as presented.

## **Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held October 14-17, 2000, were reviewed. **M. Ray made a correction on page 84 (changed Andrew Sansom to Robert L. Cook) B. Hewes moved to approve minutes. C. Perret seconded. The minutes were approved without objection.**

## **GSMFC Standing Committee Reports**

**Law Enforcement Committee (LEC)** - **J. T. Jenkins** reported that the LEC met on Tuesday, March 18. The Motorola Company provided an overview of products to eliminate the use of paper forms in the field. The Committee also received an up-to-date report on unclassified information regarding the war against drugs by Jim Kinnson, USDEA.

The LEC continued discussions on Joint Enforcement Agreements (JEAs). Of concern to the Committee was the unexpected loss of \$19 million dollars for these agreements. The funds were absorbed into the NOAA's general operating budget for some reason. There was open discussion as to whether it might be better for another agency to administer the agreements so that this would not happen again.

Other discussion included state's budget restraints and homeland defense. The LEC had no action items to present to the Commissioners.

**W. Ward** asked if a letter was sent to the Louisiana State Seafood Industry Advisory Board requesting information regarding their support of legislation that would exempt dealers, after the first point of sale, from possession of undersized fish. **L. Simpson** stated that we had sent a letter requesting information and that we had received a response stating that they would keep us informed. He anticipates that additional information from the Board will be forthcoming.

**C. Perret moved to approve the report. B. Hewes seconded, the LEC report was approved without objection.**

**Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) Report-** **C. Perret** reported that the TCC met on Tuesday, March 18, 2003. The Committee received status reports from the various states, NMFS and FWS. The following subcommittees report to the TCC: Anadromous; Crab; SEAMAP; Data Management; Artificial Reef; and, Habitat.

**On behalf of the TCC and Crab Subcommittee, C. Perret moved that the Crab Subcommittee through the Derelict Trap Task Force, be involved throughout the development of the strategic plan for education and outreach to all user groups**

**to address dolphin interactions. V. Vail seconded. The motion was approved without objection.**

The TCC received reports from the Crab Subcommittee, SEAMAP Subcommittee, Data Management Subcommittee, Artificial Reef Subcommittee, and the Habitat Subcommittee. The SEAMAP Subcommittee has revised their original goals and objectives for this program and they were approved by the TCC.

**V. Vail moved to accept the TCC report. C. Perret seconded. The TCC report was approved.**

State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee (S-FFMC) Report - **L. Simpson** stated that the S-FFMC met the morning of Wednesday, March 19, 2003. The Committee received reports from the Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC); Commercial/Recreational Fishery Advisory Panel (CRFAP); and, updates on Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program; Fisheries Information Network Programs; and, Habitat programs.

C. Brown provided a report on the USFWS National Fisheries Leadership Conference. The next meeting is scheduled for July 22-23, 2003 in Nashville, Tennessee. R. Lukens presented recent activities and progress on both methylmercury and invasive species.

He reported that the 2002 menhaden fishing season landings were 576,000 metric tons which is up 10% over the previous year. Doug Vaughan is anticipating running the Gulf stock assessment along side the Atlantic stock assessment and will present his results to the S-FFMC in October 2002. S. VanderKooy updated the MAC on the Menhaden website and GSMFC's initiative to key-enter historic CDFRs. H. Perry presented a summary report to the MAC on the derelict trap recovery efforts in the Gulf.

**On behalf of the S-FFMC, L. Simpson requested a motion to establish a cap of 25% indirect cost rate for subawards of the FIN Program. The 25% would be based on salary and fringe benefits. There would be a time limit of one year (3/19/2003 to 3/15/2004). The indirect cost rate will be looked at again, at the March 2004 meeting. W. Ward made the motion. C. Perret seconded. The indirect cost policy was approved.**

Of major concern to the S-FFMC was lack of information from NOAA/NMFS on the \$17.5 million allocated as disaster money for shrimping in the Gulf of Mexico. T. McIlwain indicated that the Congressional Affairs Office is handling this information and he would personally bring these concerns to the Regional Director, Roy Crabtree. Ann Lange will also try to get additional information to the States.

**W. Ward** asked if Commission staff had made progress in establishing a relationship with the Southern Governors Association (SGA) on issues of mutual interest and relevance. R. Lukens has made contact with the SGA's Coordinator of Natural

Resources and Environmental Issues. She was deeply involved in preparation for an upcoming meeting and stated that she looked forward to working with the Commission but would have to do so after the upcoming meeting. The initial contact was in regard to invasive species but R. Lukens does not want the relationship limited to invasive species. **W. Ward moved to aggressively pursue actions to get issues before the SGA and to develop a long term relationship. C. Nelson seconded the motion. J. Roussel suggested that we look at issues that the SGA has already taken a position on and see how we can assist with these issues and others as appropriate. B. Hewes discussed R. Lukens doing a follow-up call. R. Lukens stated that he would like to invite the SGA's Coordinator of Natural Resources and Environmental Issues to the next meeting of the Commission Business Session. W. Ward withdrew his motion.**

**C. Nelson moved to write a letter to the appropriate persons within SGA, to introduce ourselves; to establish common issues; to offer assistance; and, to invite an SGA staff member to our next meeting. W. Ward seconded. The motion was approved.**

**W. Blessey moved to approve the S-FFMC report. W. Ward seconded. The S-FFMC report was approved without objection.**

**C. Nelson** asked L. Simpson to include a discussion on the Joint Commercial/Recreational Fishery Advisory Panel's agenda at their next meeting, regarding Louisiana State Seafood Industry Advisory Board's support of legislation that would exempt dealers, after the first point of sale, from possession of undersized fish.

#### **NMFS Southeast Regional Office (NMFS/SERO) Report**

**T. McIlwain** reported on behalf of the NMFS/SERO. He reported that on March 6, 2003, NOAA Fisheries published their new strategy to further reduce bycatch. This strategy includes fishery gear improvement; standardized reporting; education; and, outreach. The strategy is available at NOAA's website.

**T. McIlwain** also reported that a code of conduct for sustainable aquaculture in the EEZ has been published in the *Federal Register*. NOAA has received 350 comments and are currently in the process of responding to those comments. This should be completed in 30 to 60 days.

This year's budget reflects increased funding for fisheries stock assessment and activities relative to stock assessment. Ongoing data collection workshops assist with determining stock assessment needs and best information available.

**T. McIlwain** stated that requests for cooperative research proposals were closed on February 18, 2003. NOAA/NMFS received several good proposals and they are currently in the review process. NOAA/NMFS is committed to cooperative research with their fisheries partners in an effort to collect better data.

This year's Saltonstall-Kennedy budget has been amended to address needs of the identified fishing community as defined under the Magnuson-Stevenson Fishery Management Conservation Act. Funding for red snapper research was cut. The funds for this research was primarily used for observer programs. In regards to the Joint Enforcement Agreement, **T. McIlwain** stated that he had just recently heard that Alabama and Louisiana had received funding, and that Texas funds have been approved and should clear shortly.

The Texas Sea Grant Program sponsored a shrimp summit in Houston, Texas to bring together NMFS and all segments of the industry. The purpose of the summit was to address problems and issues in the Shrimp Industry of the Gulf of Mexico. Most problems are economic and stem from shrimp imports. Currently 80% of shrimp consumed in the nation are imported. Shrimp is now the number one seafood product in terms of value in the nation. He reported that Congress has appropriated \$35 million for shrimp disaster relief - \$17.5 to the South Atlantic and \$17.5 to the Gulf. There has been many questions raised during this meeting as to where the funds are, when will they be available, and how they will be distributed. **T. McIlwain's** best information was that NOAA/NMFS staff is currently working with Congress trying to find out the intent of where the money is to go. A number of scenarios have been discussed but nothing has been definitive. He stated that he will bring comments from the Commission meeting to Dr. Hogarth and others involved in this process.

**C. Nelson** stated that he attended the shrimp summit because he was very interested in hearing how Dr. Hogarth would distribute the relief package to shrimp fishermen. He pointed out that the offshore fleet unloaded their catch in ports other than their home port, while the inshore or near shore fleet unloads 95% of their catch in their home port. He asked that NOAA Fisheries consider this factor and make recommendations to the states regarding this in order to avoid inequities in distribution of relief to the fishermen. He felt that the states were receiving very little directives on how to distribute these funds.

**C. Nelson** was encouraged by T. McIlwain's report about the data assessment review process. He asked what, if any effort has been made with the University of Miami, when asked to supply names of experts, to get persons who have no connection with NOAA Fisheries, including grants, etc., to serve on the review panels. He sees this as a weakness in the process. **T. McIlwain** stated that no persons are excluded and efforts are made to get the best experts in the field to participate.

**C. Nelson** stated that on behalf of himself and the National Fisheries Institute he was impressed with Dr. Hogarth's commitment to the shrimp summit and with his attempts at dealing with issues of the commercial shrimp industry. He asked that **T. McIlwain** please pass this on to Dr. Hogarth.

## USFWS Region 4 Office Report

**D. Frugé** reported on behalf of USFWS Region 4. He stated that the final rule designating critical habitat for the Gulf sturgeon will be published in the *Federal Register* today, March 19, 2003. The regulations will become effective 30 days following publication.

In the Washington office, Dr. Mami Parker, will be replacing Cathy Short as Assistant Director for Fisheries. Ms. Short is retiring.

The FWS held its first ever meeting of all Fisheries Program field office supervisors nationwide. The meeting coincided with release of a document outlining a strategic *Vision for the Future* for the Fisheries Program. He distributed information regarding the document and referred the Commissioners to <http://pacific.fws.gov/fishconf/> for a complete summary of the meeting events.

The FWS Panama City Field Office has been consulting with the Pensacola Naval Air Station regarding potential disorientation effects on hatchling sea turtles from a proposed new lighting system to be installed. The Field Office in Lafayette, Louisiana continues to represent the FWS on the Louisiana Coastal Wetlands Conservation and Restoration Task Force.

State-by-State reports from the national hunting and fishing survey are available for Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi. Other states will be completed soon.

The Department of the Interior's Strategic Plan was published in the *Federal Register* on February 24. The 60 day comment period will close April 25. The Strategic Plan can be found on the DOI's web site.

The FWS is undertaking a study on methylmercury and other contaminants in fish and wildlife in Mobile Bay similar to studies that have been done in other bay systems in the Gulf.

**D. Frugé** stated that last Friday marked the centennial of establishing the National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) system. The centennial will be celebrated through a series of activities. Information on all of these events can be found on the FWS national web site. On behalf of the FWS, **D. Frugé** expressed appreciation for the support and recognition the Commission gave to the NWR system in the resolution it put forth earlier this year in recognition of the centennial.

**D. Frugé** briefed the Commissioners on background information regarding efforts to develop an aquatic resources partnership for the Southeast between state and federal fisheries agencies and organizations. A meeting was held in February, and 20 goals and objectives of the partnership were further developed. Work groups were established to develop specific focus areas. The 6 focus areas are public use; mitigation, imperiled resources; interjurisdictional fisheries; habitat; and, aquatic nuisance species. The next meeting for the partnership committee will be July 22-23,



2003 in Nashville, Tennessee. He encouraged the state marine agency to attend and participate. The committee has put together a \$15 million budget initiative to help get the partnership effort off the ground. A copy of the budget was distributed to the State Directors. The primary focus of the budget is additional funding to the state to assist with planning efforts.

**C. Perret** has had the opportunity to review the budget initiative and he plans on attending the meeting in Nashville, Tennessee in July to show his support of this partnership committee. **D. Frugé** stated that although FWS has not been able to pay airfare they have been able to provide lodging and per diem for state personnel attending the meetings.

**W. Ward** stated that he felt that it was important that the Commission foster a good relationship with FWS and that we continue efforts to encourage FWS to support fisheries programs. He asked if we had a response to the letter that was sent to Steve Williams, Director of FWS. **L. Simpson** stated that he had discussed the letter (Tab B) with C. Brown and that C. Brown felt a response was eminent. It is being reviewed within the region. The issue of fish in the FWS has declined and there are some attempts to slowly integrate fisheries issues back into a full partnership. **W. Ward** expressed concern that there had been no response to the Commission's letter dated January 15, 2003. He felt this showed a lack of concern on FWS's part.

**D. Frugé** stated that there is recognition at the directorate level that the fisheries program is important within the FWS, but there still exists an inequity in the portion of FWS funds allocated for the fisheries program in the southeast region. He described how the system of allocating funding within the agency worked. He reported that FWS is in the process of getting a new Assistant Director for Fisheries. He feels that the new Assistant Director will be more receptive to assuring that funding allocations will be more equitable, especially in the southeast region. He suggested that a follow-up letter to the Assistant Director may be more effective.

**W. Ward** moved to send a letter to the Assistant Director expressing our concerns regarding the funding inequities in the fisheries program in the southeast region. **C. Nelson** seconded. **L. Simpson** suggested that we wait until we receive a response to our first letter. **J. Roussel** amended the motion to send the letter to the Director with a copy to the Assistant Director. There was no opposition to the amendment and the amended motion was approved without opposition.

### **FY 2003 and 2004 NMFS Budget**

**L. Simpson** stated that this has been an unusual budget cycle. In early January a Joint Resolution (H. J. Res. 2) was written that consolidated all federal appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2003. It was difficult to sort through and **L. Simpson** briefed the Commissioners on fisheries appropriations that included NOAA's operations, research and facilities; Saltonstall-Kennedy; and, NMFS. No funding was appropriated for the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation this year. NMFS budget is approximately \$580 million, a 6 percent increase.

He discussed Title V - Fisheries Disasters. Assistance to the shrimp industries in the Gulf and South Atlantic States shall be made available in the amount of \$17.5 million each. Title V also includes the blue crab fishery in the amount of \$5 million.

The Joint Resolution includes the entire Conference Report 108-10, for NMFS. **L. Simpson** stated that he anticipates little change in the conference report budget.

**L. Simpson** pointed out that the narrative recommends that the three interstate fisheries commissions may be eligible to receive a portion of the Cooperative Enforcement Program funds for use in providing law enforcement coordination among the states and NMFS. This would not be addressed unless requested and supported by the Commission's LEC.

Louisiana will receive oyster assistance in the amount of \$2 million. **L. Simpson** briefly went over funding for fisheries projects. **M. Ray** asked if L. Simpson had been able to find out how much funding goes to the Rancho Nuevo Sea Turtle research. It is a line item of \$350K in the budget. **L. Simpson** stated that Dr. Hogarth announced at the Houston Shrimp Summit that he had instructed staff to make sure the funds were transferred to Rancho Nuevo. **D. Frugé** reported that he was unsure of the amount, but FWS also transferred funds to Rancho Nuevo. **M. Ray** reported that the TPWD transferred \$60,000 to Rancho Nuevo and that was the most funds transferred by any individual agency or contributor last year. Hopefully the federal government will provide more funding this year. Not one environmental group has provided contribution to this very worthy research effort on behalf of sea turtles.

**L. Simpson** reported that Senator Hewes spoke on behalf of the Commission to Senators Cochran and Lott of Mississippi. Upon his recommendation, the Senators' staff contacted L. Simpson to discuss funding important to the Gulf states, which includes SEAMAP, FIN and Enforcement. He took the opportunity to thank Senator Hewes for his efforts.

#### **FY 2003 and 2004 USFWS Budget.**

**D. Frugé** presented budget information that showed trends in FWS budgets for the period FY2000 through FY2004. He focused on ecological services, refuge systems and migratory birds, law enforcement and fisheries. These areas have been basically level funded over the last 3 years, with the exception of refuge systems. There has been steady increases in funding for the refuge systems. He reviewed fisheries funding history. Nationwide, the fisheries budget decreased in 2004, back to the 2002 level. He pointed out that although the Fishery Resource and Coordination Offices has increased over the last 10 years, the percent of the total Fisheries budget has decreased.

#### **Invasive Species Program**

**R. Lukens** gave the Commissioners an overview of the Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel. The Commission is receiving funds from the FWS to coordinate and administer

activities for the Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel. The Regional Panel is organized under the authority of the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force. In 1996, the reauthorization established the National Invasive Species Act, which expanded the scope to address broad issue of aquatic invasive species. **R. Lukens** briefed the Commissioners on the activities of the Regional Panel, which included an agreement between the States of Mississippi and Alabama to organize and conduct a rapid assessment project. In addition, the Commission is being asked to develop a rapid response contingency plan for the Gulf of Mexico, with funding to be provided by NOAA through the National Sea Grant office.

The Regional Panel is also looking at information management activities. He discussed the website and data base on non-native species that the Commission inherited about a year ago from the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory. He is in the process of upgrading it in collaboration with the U.S. Geological Survey and the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center. He gave the Commissioners a preview of the website and explained how it will work when completed and completely upgraded. **R. Lukens** distributed copies of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among the U.S. Geological Survey, the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, and NatureServe. The MOU is intended to establish and formalize a working relationship among the signatories hereto regarding efforts to prevent the introduction or spread of invasive species, to control or manage existing invasive species, and provide vital information support management, regulatory, education, and outreach activities associated with invasive species. Specifically, the MOU establishes a cooperative and collaborative working relationship regarding database and Internet website maintenance and management to assist in efforts to address invasive species in the Gulf of Mexico region and the Nation. **R. Lukens** explained that some minor changes will be made to the final MOU document. **C. Nelson moved to conditionally approve the MOU document for signature with minor changes. The final MOU will be distributed to the Commissioners prior to signature. V. Vail seconded. J. Roussel suggested that R. Lukens work on the Scope of Work Section so that Item a. and Item b. under each organization will be more closely tied together. V. Vail asked that under Terms and Conditions, Item 3, needs to be more clearly defined. The motion was approved.**

**R. Lukens** discussed the H.R. 266, a bill to establish the National Invasive Species Council and to give the Council responsibility for coordinating all invasive species activities. **R. Lukens** stated that this bill is not controversial but needs support. It codifies Executive Order 13112, signed by President Clinton in February 1999. He encouraged the Commissioners to write letters of support to their Congressional leaders.

**R. Lukens** reviewed the reauthorization of the National Aquatic Invasive Species Act. He gave a brief background of the legislation. He gave an overview of new bills being introduced in Congress, Senate Bill 525, introduced by Mr. Levin and referred to the Environment and Public Works Committee. The House version of this bill is identical except it is contained in two separate pieces of legislation, H.R. 1080, and H.R. 1081.

He focused on Senate Bill 525, which was included in the briefing material provided to the Commissioners. It is important to note that this bill recognizes the Invasive Species Council for the first time and requires the Invasive Species Council coordinate with the ANS Task Force. The bill specifically authorizes interstate compacts to be eligible to receive funds under the Act to coordinate regional programs. Of major concern in the Gulf is ballast water, and the lions share of the bill deals with ballast water. It makes ballast water management for invasive species, including reporting, mandatory.

Other important sections include a process of identifying high priority pathways, other than ballast water. It sets up a system to screen pet and plant industries, as well as aquaculture industry. The ANS Task Force provides guidelines for development of state plans to include rapid response contingency, early detection and monitoring, aquatic plant control, and screening of planned importations. In general, this bill increases authorizations for appropriations for most sections. It specifically increases grants to states to \$30 million (up from \$5 million). The new authority for these funds allows grants to support the administration and activities of the Regional Panels.

**R. Lukens** stated that this is the type of legislation the Commission should support and encouraged the Commissioners to write letters in support of this legislation indicating that the Gulf of Mexico has a stake in seeing these bills passed.

**The meeting recessed at 5:20 pm.**

*Mike Ray*

**COMMISSION BUSINESS MEETING  
MINUTES - 53<sup>rd</sup> Annual Spring Meeting  
Thursday, March 20, 2003  
Point Clear, Alabama**

**Chairman M. Ray** reconvened the meeting at 8:05 a.m.

The following Commissioners and/or proxies were present:

**Commissioners**

Vernon Minton, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL (*Proxy for Barnett Lawley*)  
Chris Nelson, Bon Secour Fisheries, Bon Secour, AL  
Mike Ray, TPWD, Austin, TX (*Proxy for Robert L. Cook*)  
Walter J. Blessey, IV, GSMFC, Biloxi, MS  
Corky Perret, MDMF, Biloxi, MS (*Proxy for William Walker*)  
Billy Hewes, Mississippi Senate, Gulfport, MS  
John Roussel, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA (*Proxy for James H. Jenkins*)  
Virginia Vail, FL FWC, Tallahassee, FL (*Proxy for Ken Haddad*)  
William Ward, GSMFC, Tampa, FL

**Staff**

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ginny Herring, Administrative Officer, Ocean Springs, MS  
Nancy Marcellus, Administrative Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Gayle Jones, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Tom McIlwain, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS  
Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD  
Jim Franks, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
Read Hendon, USM/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS

**Selection of Charles H. Lyles Award Recipient for October 2003**

**L. Simpson** stated that the *Charles H. Lyles Award* was the highest honor the Commission can bestow on an individual, agency or organization which has contributed to the betterment of fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico through significant biological, industrial, legislative, enforcement or administrative activities.

**J. Roussel** nominated **Dr. Andrew Kemmerer** for the 2003 recipient of the *Charles H. Lyles Award*. **V. Minton** seconded. Without objection the nomination was approved.

### **Pelagic Sargassum Update**

**Read Hendon** and **Jim Franks** attended the Commission Business Session to present research entitled *Pelagic Sargassum as EFH in the Northern Gulf of Mexico: Utilization by Important Fishery Species*. The research was conducted by Gulf Coast Research Laboratory/University of Southern Mississippi, Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, and USFWS/Sport Fish Restoration Program.

**R. Hendon** stated that *Sargassum* is commonly referred to as “weed lines”. It is a pelagic brown algae found in the U.S., primarily in the western Atlantic Ocean, and Gulf of Mexico. It uses its gas-filled pods to float to the upper meter of the ocean surface. It reproduces by fragmentation. The two predominant species in the Gulf are natans and fluitans.

He discussed the three types of *Sargassum* aggregations used in their sampling: large mats; scattered clumps; and, windrow (sargassum entrained in a frontal zone). Frontal zones are boundaries where two water masses converge, also called a “convergence zone” or “blue-water rips”. A main objective for Year 4 will be to determine how windrows compare to these “barren” frontal zones in their importance to fishes and does the importance vary by life history stages? He discussed the occurrence of *Sargassum* off the Mississippi Coast and Northern Gulf.

**R. Hendon** stated that in offshore marine waters, *Sargassum* provides refuge from predators for larval and juvenile fishes and abundance of small shrimp and crabs for these young fishes to feed on. It provides physical structure around which spawning fishes may aggregate and spawning substrate for various fishes. *Sargassum* has significant value for recreational (and commercial) fisheries in the Gulf states.

He described the current research which represents only the second known study of the fish/*Sargassum* relationship in the northern Gulf of Mexico. The primary research goal is to describe the diversity and abundance of fishes associated with *Sargassum* in the northern Gulf of Mexico, focusing primarily on important fishery species. He presented the research approach and provided a summary of all fishes collected. More juvenile/sub-adult fish were observed under mats than windrows and patches.

*Sargassum* is habitat for many species important to the fisheries of each of the Gulf states, thus has a positive impact on our economy. It is important to both commercial and recreational fisheries.

**R. Hendon** stated that the current SAFMC’s Dolphin-Wahoo FMP, which is awaiting approval is contingent upon approval of a *Sargassum* Plan. This research will define the “importance” of *Sargassum* as EFH on a species by species basis. It represents a habitat/ecosystem approach and answers research needs defined by fishery

management councils. It will define the relative importance of pelagic *Sargassum* weedlines and oceanic fronts for early life stages of managed species, as well as other research needs.

### **Methylmercury Gulf Wide Initiative**

**R. Lukens** reviewed past directives. At the last meeting of the Commission the methylmercury report was adopted. Since that time it has been distributed to state and federal agencies, Congressional delegates, and other interested entities. He referred the Commissioners to Tab E of the briefing book, to review the recommendations and budget information contained in the methylmercury report.

He described the work being done by the Gulf of Mexico Program in the effort to deal with Recommendation #3. They have had several meetings and conference calls to deal with the issue of common advisory levels for mercury in the Gulf of Mexico.

**R. Lukens** discussed efforts that are still in the planning stages to address Recommendation #5. LaDon Swan, Mississippi/Alabama Sea Grant will provide funding to conduct a seafood consumption survey.

Dr. Bill Sanders, EPA is the coordinator of the federal interagency work group that is addressing methylmercury at the national level. The work group is gathering information from federal agencies and preparing a summary report of agency activities. **R. Lukens** provided a copy of the Commission's report. The report is due out soon and R. Lukens will stay in touch with Dr. Sanders.

### **FIN Program Report and FIN Web Access of Data**

**D. Donaldson** updated the Commissioners on the 2003 FIN activities, which include coordination and administration of the program. The program continues to provide for the collection, management and dissemination of marine recreational fisheries data. He stated that almost 61,000 interviews were conducted in 2002, that is 45% over quota. A conjoint study will begin in July 2003 that will address economic impacts of proposed fishing regulations. Other activities include head boat port sampling in Texas, Louisiana and Florida, and Gulf menhaden port sampling. Trip ticket programs for commercial fisheries data have been implemented in Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

Recreational and commercial biological sampling is underway. A total of 15,000 otoliths have been collected. In conjunction with this activity, an otolith processing guidelines document has been developed which outlines analysis procedures for various species.

The FIN Data Management System (DMS) has been on line since July 2002. **D. Donaldson** stated that he is actively trying to spread the word about this system, which is open to confidential and non-confidential users. He reported that M. Sestak,

Data Base Manager has been called up in the Army and may be gone for 3 months to 2 years. The FIN group is focusing on maintaining the system in his absence.

### **Interjurisdictional Fisheries (IJF) Program Update**

**L. Simpson** referred the Commissioners to Tab G in the briefing book, which provided a written update of the IJF Program. He stated that this program was involved in a wide cross section of practical fishery activities that touch on state and federal research. It is a very diverse program and he is very impressed with the various projects that IJF is involved in. Currently IJF is working on a derelict trap guideline document; marine mammals; an otolith manual; striped bass FMP revision; Gulf menhaden website and CDFRs; law enforcement; and, a ProCite on-line repository.

### **Joint Commission/Council Habitat Program Report**

**J. Rester** briefed the Commissioners on his recent activities. He reported that the Council's Technical Review Panel met to review the 2<sup>nd</sup> draft EFH EIS. The contractors for the Council is still working on the document. A final draft should be ready by June 27, 2003. The EIS involves examining alternatives for designating EFH in the Gulf, examining alternatives for designating habitat areas of particular concern, and examining alternatives for preventing, mitigating, or minimizing adverse effects of fishing on EFH. He also had the opportunity to listen to presentations on methylmercury issues and on the use of explosives in the removal of oil and gas platforms. The latter presentation involved research to look at how this process impacted fish and fish habitat. The impact was considered insignificant. **The Commissioners requested that J. Rester gather additional information to include data from NMFS Observers, LDWF, past correspondence from the Commission, regulations governing this issue, Minerals Management, oil to rigs programs, etc.. They requested this item be placed on their next agenda for discussion to include its impacts on all species and mitigation issues**

**J. Rester** reported that he attended a meeting of the Mississippi River/Gulf of Mexico Watershed Nutrient Task Force. The purpose of the meeting was to review the progress of the various work groups that are under the direction of the Task Force.

**J. Rester** has been working with the Commission's Derelict Trap Task Force. The Task Force recently submitted a proposal to NOAA's Community Based Restoration Program for funding for state trap removal programs.

He reported that the *Annotated Bibliography of Fishing Impacts on Habitat* has been used extensively in the development of the EIS the Council is producing. It continues to be updated and currently contains 700 citations.



## **Executive Committee Report**

**M. Ray** reported that the Executive Committee met on Wednesday, March 19, 2003. He reported that the Committee reviewed, revised and approved a performance evaluation plan for Commission personnel. The other issue discussed was state membership dues and options for change and increases that may need to occur in the future. **L. Simpson** was directed to continue to update the Executive Committee and the full Commission on this issue.

**V. Minton** moved to approve the report and the performance evaluation plan. **J. Roussel** seconded the motion and the motion passed.

## **State Director's Reports**

Florida - **V. Vail** reported on behalf of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). She reported that Florida's legislative appointee to the GSMFC, Representative Jeff Kottkamp, resigned because his legislative duties will not allow him the time necessary to appropriately address GSMFC issues. The FWC Legislative Affairs Director is coordinating a request for new appointees to both the GSMFC and ASMFC. The next legislative appointee to the GSMFC will be from the Florida Senate.

The Florida Legislature began its 2003 session on March 4, and attention will be focused on budget considerations. The Governor's proposed budget for 2003-2004 is approximately \$10 billion less than the current year budget, which includes \$20-30 million less for the FWC, and the loss of 40-60 positions. A recent Revenue Estimating Conference determined incoming revenues might be \$500 million less next year than previously anticipated. There is a "surplus" in a couple of trust funds that might be used to buffer the decrease of available funds, but by law Florida's budget will be balanced to equal available revenue.

The Commission has proposed several statutory amendments relevant to marine fisheries management:

- a proposal to strengthen criminal penalties for conviction [=any judicial disposition other than acquittal or dismissal] of selling or purchasing saltwater products without the required licenses; to include mandatory jail sentence and increased fines.
- a proposal to standardize the authority to assess administrative penalties and suspend or revoke commercial saltwater fishing privileges for theft of and from traps in the blue crab, spiny lobster and stone crab fisheries.
- a proposal to retain the Brevard County Clam License, which sunsets June 30, and convert it from a three year license to an annual license.
- a proposal to strengthen criminal penalties for certain net violations.

The Commission will be meeting March 26 and 27, and several issues will be considered. A Ballyhoo Management draft rule will be presented for initial

consideration of establishing a permit to use lampara nets and allowable gear for the harvest of ballyhoo; commercial trip and vessel limits; permits will be issued for those who meet the eligibility requirements of 10,000 pounds or 55,000 individual ballyhoo in any one of three specified time periods; no additional permits will be issued and the permit holder must renew annually by September 30, and continue to land at least 10,000 pounds in any one of three consecutive years or forfeit the permit.

Other issues will be to consider draft rules to bring state regulations on swordfish and billfish into consistency with the federal regulations: i.e., angler swordfish bag limit of 1 fish per day; billfish must be landed whole; and, require reporting of non-tournament landings of billfish and swordfish.

A Stone Crab draft rule is also being proposed to retain the function of the Trap Certificate Advisory Board for another five years and implement some of the recommendations made by the Board (e.g., close blue crab season for a brief period before the start of stone crab season to inhibit the use of blue crab trap to get a head start on stone crab season; exclude blue crab traps from shrimping areas currently closed to stone crabbers). The Board recommendations are the result of 3 meetings held recently to obtain comments from stone crabbers on problems in the fishery and trap certificate program.

The FWC is into the strategic planning stages for a reorganization with organizational units based more on function than topic. It is anticipated the plan, and corresponding budgets, will be completed by the end of summer for presentation to legislative committees and Legislators in the fall. If approved, it would go into effect July 1, 2004.

Alabama - **V. Minton** reported on behalf of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources/Marine Resources Division (ADCNR/MRD). He reported that the Alabama Legislature is now in session. A new Commissioner has been appointed, Representative Steve Mc Millan. A formal notification should be received shortly.

Alabama also has budget problems. The State is projecting a \$500 million deficit. The MRD has been directed to cut personnel (including fringe) by 5%. This is just the beginning of the cuts.

Artificial reefs, both inshore and offshore are gearing up. There is currently 2,000 tons of defective concrete pipe staged for use inshore and offshore, depending on the size of the pipe. This will make excellent reef material.

The MRD conducted its second derelict crab trap removal on March 15. They collected over 1,000 traps. They will conduct another clean-up in deep water in conjunction with the opening of shrimp season.

Mississippi - **C. Perret** reported on behalf of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR). He stated that the Mississippi Legislature was also in session and he took the opportunity to thank Senator Hewes for taking the time to attend this

meeting. The State of Mississippi has also had budget short falls. The state agencies were initially asked to reduce their budgets by 5%. They have since been asked to reduce them further. The Legislature does not want to increase revenues (by increasing license fees) especially since the revenue generated can be substantial.

**C. Perret** reported that Mississippi was the first state to implement a derelict crab trap removal program, but they had no specific legislation for a closed season to remove the traps. Senator Hewes authored legislation establishing a closed season and it was approved. The first closed season was held in January on the coldest day of the year, but MDMR with the help of the GCRL, ADCNR/MRD and others, were able to successfully remove 1,600 traps.

**C. Perret** stated that because of Senator Hewes many activities in support of conservation, including the derelict crab trap removal program, the MDMR nominated him and he subsequently won the *Legislative Conservationist of the Year Award* presented annually by the Wildlife Federation of Mississippi.

The oyster season opened with 180 boats harvesting 4,501 sacks of oysters. Unfortunately due to rain and other factors, the water quality was such that the season was closed. These things are out of the Department and the fishermen's control. Hopefully improvements in septic systems and sewage treatment plants in the future, will allow the MDMR keep the reefs opened longer. Fishermen have become very frustrated. The season has now been closed for 5 weeks. He reported that the Seafood Technology Bureau has produced a video on post harvest treatment and stated that it was very good and he could get copies if anyone was interested.

MDMR has enhanced 6 offshore artificial reef sites with concrete rubble and armored personnel carriers. They have enhanced inshore sites using concrete rubble, limestone, etc.. They have constructed Handkerchief Key off of Bay St. Louis using concrete rubble from bridge demolition work. This Key is exposed out of the water 3 feet, and will provide safe haven for vessels during bad weather as well as enhancing fishing opportunities.

Texas - **M. Ray** reported on behalf of the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). He briefed the Commissioners on various TPWD activities. He reported that menhaden fin-clip samples have been obtained from across the Gulf of Mexico and along the U. S. Atlantic Coast. Both nuclear and mitochondrial DNA genes are being screened for differences among Gulf of Mexico sites.

The Texas Shrimp Management Program has sold about 90 licenses (42 bait and 48 bay) during the 11<sup>th</sup> round for an average price of \$7,100. To date, 905 bay and bait shrimping licenses have been purchased for \$5 million.

Six licenses were purchased during the 3<sup>rd</sup> round of the buy back program under the Crab License Management Program, for an average price of \$5,100. A total of 22 crabbing licenses have been retired for \$96,000.

The Commercial Finfish License Management Program 2<sup>nd</sup> round buy back resulted in 33 licenses being retired at an average price of \$4,400. Since the program began, 46 licenses have been retired at a cost of \$200,000.

**M. Ray** updated the Commissioners on TPWD's Abandoned Crab Trap Removal Program. From February 15 through March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3,858 abandoned crab traps were picked up by volunteers, TPWD Coastal Fisheries staff, game wardens, and others. A total of 494 volunteers assisted and 152 vessels were used to pick up the traps, one of which dated back to 1992. The area where the most traps were picked up was San Antonio Bay, where 1,558 were recovered. A total of 12,000 abandoned traps were removed from Texas water during the last 2 years.

Following an extensive biological data review and public scoping process, TPWD is advocating regulation changes designed to improve opportunity for angler success by bolstering spotted seatrout populations. While the recommendations would not affect the current 10 fish daily bag limit or 15-inch minimum size limit for trout, it would cap the maximum legal length limit at 25 inches, with one trout longer than 25 inches per day, and establish a boat limit during for-hire outings. In addition, a guide permit fee increase from \$75 to \$200, as well as a U.S. Coast Guard proficiency certification as a for-hire captain or equivalent training and testing are proposed.

The Texas Legislature is in session and there are a few coastal fishing related bills. SB 607, would modify the current law regulating the Texas crab trap closure. The bill would designate crab traps as litter beginning the first day of the closed season so anyone could remove them. Under current regulations, during the first seven days of what can be a 10 to 30 day closed season on use of crab traps, only law enforcement officials can legally pick up abandoned crab traps. After the seven days, anyone can remove crab traps.

SB 608, would change the definition of a fishing guide and give the TPWD authority to create separate licenses for resident and non-resident freshwater and saltwater guides.

**M. Ray** reported that TPWD has been forced to return 7% of its FY2003 budget to help balance the state budget. A hiring freeze, elimination of equipment purchases, and out of state travel freeze, and reductions in operational expenditures were implemented as a result. The agency is currently developing the FY2004 and FY2005, budgets, both of which must be 12.5% less than the current budget.

Dr. Mark Fisher was selected as Coastal Fisheries new science director at the Rockport Marine Lab. Representative Gene Seaman has been appointed to serve as the Texas legislative delegate to the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission replacing retired Senator Buster Brown.

Louisiana - **J. Roussel** reported on behalf of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF). He stated that the LDWF is holding meetings to review their artificial reef programs. They are meeting with various interest groups to discuss the

15 year old program to see if opportunities to make adjustments exist. Several ideas have emerged from the discussion and starting next week they are holding a series of public hearings to get input on these ideas.

As a result of storms, several oil and gas operators have approached LDWF regarding structures that were damaged. They are currently doing an evaluation to see about developing new artificial reef sites with the opportunities that these structure present.

**J. Roussel** reported that the Louisiana Legislature will convene in 2 weeks. There are several pre-filed fishery bills. He mentioned that legislation to establish a season to remove derelict crab traps will be presented. There has been some concern about how prudent the Department will be in using this authority, but hopefully this legislation will be approved in some form.

The oyster lease moratorium is continuing and is now under final rule. There is no ending date to the moratorium, this in response to law suits filed against the states regarding damages to leases during coastal restoration.

He reported that 63 of the 873 dealers in Louisiana are reporting using electronic trip tickets. These dealers represent 30% of the state's landings, which means that a substantial portion of the data is being captured and transmitted electronically.

**J. Roussel** stated that the Governor has established an Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force under the LDWF. The task force has met several times and will meet next week to finalize the first draft of an aquatic invasive species management plan. There has been a lot of interest from a very diverse group of people engaged in this task force.

He reported that the Department recently accepted delivery of a new research vessel. It is a 52' by 18', similar to one that Texas recently purchased. It has two 500 plus hp engines and is fully equipped.

In conclusion, **J. Roussel** reported that the Department had recently completed a feasibility study on whether or not to renovate or replace the Coastal Research Facility. Parts of the facility are 40 years old, and being located on a barrier island has caused erosion. It was decided that the facility would be replaced at a new location to be determined. When completed, the new facility will have an education component.

### **Future Meetings**

G. Herring reported that she had entered into an agreement with the Omni Bayfront Hotel in Corpus Christi, Texas for the October 13-16, 2003 meeting.

She is still reviewing proposals for the New Orleans meeting to be held March 15-18, 2004.

L. Simpson stated that in the future, we would try to plan more down time so that we are not always sitting in a meeting room for 8 hours a day. We will plan educational and cultural field trips during the meetings in the future.

### **Publication List**

L. Simpson stated the Publication List has been updated and is provided for informational purposes. Contact the office if you need copies of any publication.

### **Other Business**

**W. Ward requested that an item regarding duplication of effort between the Commission and the states be put on the agenda for the next meeting where appropriate. L. Simpson suggested that it be put on the S-FFMC agenda.**

**The meeting was adjourned at 10:15 a.m.**

Otolith Processors Training Meeting  
Meeting Summary  
May 21, 2003  
St. Petersburg, Florida

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. and the following people were present:

Mark Holden, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Wesley Devers, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Tonie Saylor, TPWD, Palacios, TX  
Adam Richardson, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Janet Tunnell, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Debbie Belk, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Tom Fuller, TPWD, Palacios, TX  
Isis Longo, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Ken Edds, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Prince Robinson, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Joe O'Hop, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Teresa DeBruler, Mote Marine Lab, Sarasota, FL  
Nick Parnell, Mote Marine Lab, Sarasota, FL  
Robert Allman, NMFS, Panama City, FL  
Debra Murie, UF, Gainesville, FL  
Steve Candileri, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Presentation of University of Florida Amberjack Project

D. Murie provided the group with an overview of a potential project regarding amberjacks. The priority species for this project will be greater amberjack, banded rudderfish, almaco jack and lesser amberjack with an emphasis on greater amberjack. The assessment method for greater amberjack is the virtual population analysis (VPA). It assumes the catch at age is known exactly. However, the age composition is inferred from the length composition using a growth curve and the length data may not be sufficient to characterize variability in length at age. Other issues about amberjacks include very little is known about variability in growth by region (and gear) and age-length keys by region and gear. Sampling needs to be conducted by region, by gear over all sizes and seasons to address these issues. In addition, the fecundity and age/size of sexual maturity of these fish are unknown and currently are estimated. She outlined several previous studies conducted on greater amberjack and concluded that there is not much known about these fish. The planned study will focus on greater amberjack, banded rudderfish, almaco jack and lesser amberjack and sampling will cover the commercial, recreational and head boat fisheries in the entire Gulf of Mexico, with quarterly sampling. The primary method for determining age will be a thin, cross-section of sagittal otoliths with a secondary method of cross-sections of fin-rays (using either dorsal, pectoral or pelvic rays depending on which provides the best information). She would like to collaborate with the various NMFS laboratories as well as the states to provide as many otoliths for these species as possible.

### Discussion of Red Snapper Otolith Ageing Techniques and Associated Problems

R. Allman discussed the training set CD which contains 100 otolith images including annotated images and an excel file with Panama City/LSU ring counts and edge types. He also discussed the reference collection which is a representative sample of 300 otoliths take from months of the year and is used to test reader precision. He provided several slides of red snapper otoliths and demonstrated how the ages were determined for those otoliths. He also pointed out the delta, core ring and translucent zone of the otoliths to help readers determine where to find these characteristics. He also displayed a graph showing the variation between readers for determining age and emphasized the importance of routine training (like this meeting) to ensure readers are as consistent as possible. After the presentation, the group discussed the process for ageing red snapper. It was decided that the red snapper reference set would be distributed to each agency laboratory for use by their personnel. Once a laboratory staff has read the otoliths, they will send the set to the next agency. The set will be sent to Florida first and then move west. The group discussed edge type and determined that all the states are using the codes in the Otolith Manual.

### Discussion of Otolith Processing Issues and Problems

The group discussed the various problems and issues associated with processing otoliths. The group discussed the red snapper reference set. R. Allman stated that there are currently 300 sets of red snapper otoliths in the collection, which were collected by federal port agents. It was suggested that the states provide some otoliths to make the reference set more representative of the Gulf of Mexico. After some discussion, the group decided that each state would set 50 sets of red snapper otoliths to R. Allman as soon as possible. R. Allman would update the reference set and sent it to Florida, for their use. Once the states have sent the otoliths, the total number of sets would be 550 red snapper otoliths. J. Tunnell distributed a table that outlined the capabilities of the various ageing laboratories in the Gulf of Mexico. It was provided to the group as an informational item and there was no action to be taken.

### Conducting Otolith Reading Activities for Red Snapper and Greater Amberjack

The group split into three sections and conducted reading of 12 sets of otoliths for red snappers (2 groups) and greater amberjack. Each group read the otoliths and determined the age and edge type for each fish. This information was recorded and provided to moderator for compilation.

### Review and Comparison of Reading Exercise by Groups

After each group determined the ages of the various fish, the information was entered into a spreadsheet and R. Allman calculated average percent error (APE) for each of the species. For red snapper, the APE was 16% and for greater amberjack, the APE was 25%. Ideally, an APE of 5% is desired. Although the APEs were higher than the ideal, it was noted that the ages for some of the groups may not have been accurately represented because the edge type was not factored into the age and definitive ages was not assigned by all groups.

### Processing Status of Otoliths Collected in 2002 and 2003

D. Donaldson stated that the group needed to discuss the status of the otolith processing. T. Saylor noted that the processing and reading of otoliths collected in 2002 is almost complete and work is beginning on otoliths collected in 2003. For Louisiana, K. Edds stated that all otoliths



collected in 2002 have been processed and read and Louisiana staff is up-to-date on the otoliths collected in 2003. D. Belk mentioned that Mississippi has processed and read all the red snapper otoliths collected in 2002. Work is continuing on king mackerel and flounder otoliths and is proceeding slowly since there is only one person cutting these otoliths. For 2003, the red snapper otoliths collected in Mississippi have been processed through February but still need to be read. Work has begun on the other species but have yet to be read. And in Florida, J. Tunnell stated that the about half of the red snapper otoliths collected in 2002 have been mounted but none have been read.

#### Discussion of Future Training Meeting

The group decided that the next meeting should be held at Florida Marine Research Institute (FMRI) during May 2004. D. Donaldson then asked the group for input regarding the next meeting. It was suggested that the reading exercises for various species needs to be continued and should be the basis of the meeting. Other pertinent presentations and discussions could be added, such as discussion of red snapper and greater amberjack reference sets, status of UF amberjack project, development of additional reference sets for different species, etc. D. Donaldson stated that he would develop a draft agenda prior to the meeting and distribute it to everyone for comment.

#### Tour of FMRI Otolith Processing Lab

The group took a tour of the processing lab at FMRI and went through the process of cutting and mounting otoliths.

**Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.**

FIN Data Collection Plan Work Group  
Meeting Summary  
June 3, 2003

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. The following people were present:

Bob Muller, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Mike Murphy, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Behzad Mahmoudi, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Joe O'Hop, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Britt Bumgardner, TPWD, Palacios, TX  
Jim Duffy, ADCNR, Dauphin Island, AL  
Joey Shepard, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
James "Tut" Warren, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL  
John Poffenberger, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Steve Turner, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Gary Fitzhugh, NMFS, Panama City, FL  
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ron Lukens, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Review of 2002 and 2003 Otolith and Length Data Collection and Processing Activities

D. Donaldson noted that the group needed to review the status of the data collection process for biological data. J. Poffenberger stated that the group needed to review the targets in terms of representative sampling. The purpose of establishing the targets was to ensure that the species were representatively sampled throughout the region. The group needed to look at the total number of otoliths collected versus the landings of that species and compare the percentage of each (otoliths vs. landings). Theoretically, the percentage (by state) of otoliths collected vs. the percentage (by state) landed for a species should be fairly close. The group discussed how to ensure that representative sampling is occurring and it was noted that that is the responsibility of the sampling supervisor and in part the reason for having the tracking mechanism in place. G. Fitzhugh stated that there really was not a need to provide monthly reports of otoliths collected. Samplers could provide this information on a yearly basis since it is difficult to keep track of all the samples being collected by the various agencies. R. Lukens disagreed and stated that there needs to be monthly reporting to ensure that an agency does not over (or under) sampling a particular species. By having monthly reporting, it will ensure that agencies adhere to the established targets and thus ensure representative sampling. There appeared to be some confusion about entire design of the program so J. Shepard provided a brief overview of the Fisheries Information Network (FIN). He stated that on the commercial side, the trip ticket system is the backbone of the program. Under the trip ticket system, there are various modules for collecting the needed data. One of the modules is the biological sampling module. The trip ticket system identifies the universe, which then allows for sampling to occur and ensure that the collected data are representative of the various fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico. After some discussion, the group decided to compare the percentage of otoliths collected vs. the percentage of landings for each of the five priority species. After setting up a spreadsheet, the

group determined that collection of otoliths for greater amberjack and red snapper was representative (by state) of the commercial landing. However, it was pointed out that for red snapper, the number of otoliths in Texas was a little low. For gulf flounder, the sampling did not appear to be representative of the landings. For southern flounder, Florida and Alabama do not appear to be collecting enough otoliths and thus the sampling is not representative for those states. For king mackerel, the group determined that the landings data appear to be erroneous and could not evaluate the sampling distribution. After some discussion, D. Donaldson stated that he would examine the data and determine what errors were made and then redistribute the data set. The revised dataset should examine the data (by state), by commercial vs. recreational and landings vs. otoliths collected (with targets).

#### Recommendations for Necessary Lengths and Otoliths for FIN Priority Species

The group then discussed the collection of necessary data. It was pointed out that the purpose of this activity was to improve stock assessments for the various species in the Gulf. There were two lines of thought discussed by the group. The first was to increase sampling of more species instead of focusing on only five species. Since funding for this activity has not increased, efforts should be placed to increase the number of species that are sampled and thus increase the amount of biological data available for stock assessments. The counter argument to that point is to focus on the five priority species (which were selected by FIN) and sample them in a representative manner. Then, when a stock assessment is needed for these species, there is a very robust dataset available, which in turn translates to a more reliable stock assessment. The group discussed this issue for quite some time. It was suggested that the targets (by state) remain constant but there could be some modification within the cells for each species. This might free up some funds to do additional species. It was also suggested to reduce the maximum number of otoliths per cell from 1,000 to 500. And, the desire was expressed that further consideration of the sampling design (number of significant strata, number of samples per strata), would take place for red snapper during the upcoming 2004 assessment and review. The increased age structure sampling of red snapper that occurred during the last few years should facilitate this examination. This approach might then be extended to other species. It was also pointed out that 200-500 samples per significant strata would be adequate. However, after all the discussion, **the group recommended that the biological sampling targets (established in the 2002 Data Collection Plan) should be used as the targets for the 2004 biological sampling activities.**

#### Development of 2004 FIN Data Collection Plan Document

D. Donaldson distributed the 2003 document for the group to review. It was pointed out the there were some sections of the document that could be strengthened by adding more detail. It was suggested that including the average weights used to convert pounds to numbers of fish for the commercial landings could be included, what years were used in establishing the targets, as well as other details. D. Donaldson stated that he would update the document with these additions and distribute it to the group for review. Once the document was reviewed and approved, FIN staff will print and distribute it to the appropriate FIN committees, subcommittees, work groups and other interested parties.

#### Other Business

The group discussed some of the processing issues associated with the collection of these

data. The capacity of the each of the facilities was addressed and it was noted that it is very important to disassociate the collection and processing components of this activity. It was also stated that there are some efficiencies to be achieved by pooling the various agencies talents and expertise for processing the large variety of species sampled. It was suggested that several work groups could be established to focus on specific species. This would allow a small group of individuals to develop expertise for this particular species and thus reduce the amount of reading errors and ensure comparability and compatibility among the various readers. It was agreed that this was a good idea and the group needs to further explore this concept.

**There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:15 p.m.**

**FISHERIES INFORMATION NETWORK (FIN)  
MINUTES  
June 4 and 5, 2003  
Orlando, Florida**

Chairman Kevin Anson called the meeting to order on June 4, 2003 at 8:30 a.m. The following members, staff, and others were present:

**Members**

Kevin Anson, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL  
Steven Atran, GMFMC, Tampa, FL  
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Guy Davenport, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL  
Chris Denson, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL  
Bob Dixon, NOAA Fisheries, Beaufort, NC  
Stephen Holiman, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL  
Christine Johnson, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Craig Lilyestrom, PRDNER, San Juan, PR  
Ron Lukens, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Joe O'Hop, FFWCC, St. Petersburg, FL  
Joseph Shepard, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Tom Sminkey, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD  
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX

**Staff**

Gregg Bray, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Madeleine Travis, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Shannon Bettridge, ACCSP, Washington, DC  
Britt Bumguardner, TPWD, Palacios, TX  
Mike Cahall, ACCSP, Washington, DC  
Rita Curtis, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD  
Tom Gleason, NOAA Fisheries, Silver Spring, MD  
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Maury Osborn, ACCSP, Washington, DC  
Claude Petersen, Southwest Computer Bureau, Gonzales, LA  
John Reed, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL  
Robert Sadler, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL  
Carolyn Sranek, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL

**Approval of Agenda**

The agenda was approved as amended.

### **Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the Fisheries Information Network (FIN) meeting held on June, 4 and 5, and 6, 2002 in New Orleans, Louisiana were approved as presented.

### **Status of Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP)**

M. Osborn reported on the activities and progress of the ACCSP, noting that commercial catch and effort is the highest priority module. The ACCSP has three states in the southeast that have implemented ACCSP standards including trip level data, mandatory reporting, and routine data feeds to the ACCSP. Other states on the Atlantic coast are at varying stages of implementation of a trip ticket system and progress is being made.

Osborn reported that the Standard Atlantic Fishery Information System (SAFIS) was begun in 2002 with the state of Rhode Island. The SAFIS was developed to assist and support states on a long term basis, be cost effective and easily transportable. The SAFIS has web-based dealer reporting and trip level reporting. A coordinator assists dealers in startup and training, adding an average of two dealers per week. Osborn noted that SAFIS will probably not be implemented in the southeast since those states have their own systems and adequate resources. A meeting was held with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to discuss the use of SAFIS for dealer reporting and a decision is expected shortly.

Osborn reported that they are implementing the new Vessel Directory Telephone Survey which the Gulf has been using for Charter Boat methodology since 2000. Outreach efforts will be a joint MRFSS and ACCSP project beginning in July 2003 and head boats will begin carrying observers to collect catch/effort and bycatch data. Osborn noted that the ACCSP funded a 50% increase for recreational catch and effort sampling in the Northeast region.

Osborn stated that discussions will be held this year with NMFS on how to integrate highly migratory species monitoring. Pilot studies on commercial socio-economic data have been conducted for over three years, with Georgia currently analyzing the data. The Northeast Region is collecting socio-economic data through this year and analysis will be done in spring of 2004. The ACCSP has sent out an RFP for biological sampling priorities for FY 2004. A system is being developed to track how many samples have been collected for various species and this will be coordinated with the FIN program. Osborn then reported on the bycatch module noting that the ACCSP had funded \$300,000 for groundfish observers in the Northeast as well as implementation of observers in the for-hire sector. ACCSP staff are also participating in National Observer Program Advisory Team meetings.

In closing Osborn reported that the ACCSP annual budget for 2003 is \$3.5 million. A strategic plan was completed in 2002 and copies of this plan were distributed to Committee members.

### **Review of List of Personnel with Access to Confidential Data**

G. Davenport of NMFS distributed copies of a list of personnel with access to confidential data and requested that Committee members review this list and notify him of any additions, deletions or corrections. Davenport also provided non-disclosure forms to Committee members. D. Donaldson provided Committee members with a list of personnel and their access levels for the FIN Data Management System and asked Committee members for corrections.

### **Status of the FIN Data Management System**

D. Donaldson reported that M. Sestak of GSMFC was called up for active duty in the Army this January. New modules will probably not be added until his return, however trip ticket data continue to be loaded into the Data Management System (DMS) as well as recreational catch estimates through 2002, and SEAMAP data. M. Kasprzak reported on a problem in Louisiana concerning unload date and trip date. Kasprzak noted that dealers can report multiple days of trips on trip tickets from oyster and crab fishermen. M. Cahall stated that issue can be corrected and he would coordinate with M. Sestak when he returns.

### **Data Confidentiality Issues**

Status of Caribbean Data Confidentiality MOA - D. Donaldson noted that the Committee had discussed putting Caribbean data into the FIN DMS and providing access to that data. In order to do that, an MOA must be signed by all parties. The MOA has been signed by NMFS and the U.S.V.I.. The Commissioners of the GSMFC will have an opportunity to sign at the October Commission meeting. After being signed by the GSMFC, it will be forwarded to Puerto Rico for signature. The Committee agreed that this schedule was suitable.

GSMFC Action Regarding Data Confidentiality - D. Donaldson reported that at a meeting of the State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee (S-FFMC) it had been suggested that language regarding protection of confidential data be included in the FIN cooperative agreements with NMFS and the individual subgrants executed between the GSMFC and each state agency. A motion to that effect was passed at the Commission Business Meeting. The GSMFC adopted a policy regarding the protection of confidential data and will use this policy (instead of the MOA) to ensure the protection of the data.

### **Presentation of Mississippi Night Fishing Pilot Survey Preliminary Results**

G. Bray of GSMFC gave a presentation of the preliminary results of the Mississippi Night Fishing Pilot Survey conducted in 2001 and 2002. Bray acknowledged the dedication of K. Cuevas and the staff of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) and T. Sminkey of NMFS.

Bray noted that very little data is available on night fishing activities in the Gulf of Mexico with almost all interviews for the MRFSS survey being conducted during the day. The goals of the pilot survey were to determine if catch and harvest rates of shore anglers fishing at night were different from daytime rates, and to produce expanded estimates of catch and harvest using night survey data and compare the differences. A night site register was developed to provide the MDMR with monthly sampling schedules and the same sampling forms as used in the MRFSS. Two samplers were sent out together for each assignment and they had to determine that the majority of fishing occurred during night hours. Completed forms were delivered to the GSMFC office for data entry and error checks.

Bray reviewed the results of the survey and noted the number of interviews obtained, the hours fished from shore, species observed, and the catch rate comparison in 2001 and 2002 for both day and night. Bray then explained the expanded estimates.

In closing, Bray reported on the conclusions of the Night Fishing Pilot Survey noting that the species observed during night sampling were similar to day sampling, some differences in catch rates were observed between day and night fishing, and overall differences in expanded estimates were not significant from a management standpoint.

The Mississippi Night Fishing Pilot Survey results will be available on the GSMFC website. K. Cuevas thanked the GSMFC and G. Bray for the opportunity to conduct this study. The Committee agreed on the addition of tables and an explanation on the differences in catch rates for day and night fishing to the report. **K. Cuevas moved to approve the Night Fishing Pilot Survey with additions. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

D. Donaldson stated that the Night Fishing Pilot Survey will be presented to the S-FFMC in October. Donaldson asked the Committee for input on whether the Night Fishing Survey is specific to Mississippi or if it pertains to the entire Gulf and should be continued. The Committee discussed this at length, and **R. Lukens moved that when the Biological/Environmental Work Group next convenes, they look at the issue of the Night Fishing Survey in the Gulf and make a recommendation on how to proceed and report back to the FIN Committee. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

### **Presentation of Data Quality Act**

Tom Gleason of NOAA Fisheries in Silver Spring gave a presentation on the Data Quality Act and noted that Section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for FY 2001 is called the Data Quality Act. Section 515 directed the OMB to issue government wide guidelines to provide guidance to federal agencies for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information disseminated by federal agencies. The OMB directed each federal agency to develop guidelines. Gleason then reviewed the requirements including standards, pre-dissemination review, administrative mechanism and reporting to OMB. The two key concepts of the Data Quality Act are information and dissemination of information. Gleason noted that NOAA's Section 515 Guidelines are posted on the NOAA home page under Information Quality, and then he reviewed the seven categories of information and examples of objectivity standards.

Gleason then discussed the relevance of the Data Quality Act to the FIN Committee. Since the FIN Committee regularly provides data to NOAA and this data is used to develop information products, this data must be of known quality and consistent with NOAA's Information Quality Guidelines. Gleason stated that since the FIN Committee receives money from NOAA/NMFS for the collection of fisheries statistics, the FIN Committee is acting as an extension of NMFS, this would not be considered third party data and would have to meet the NOAA information quality standards. Gleason noted that since all FIN data is subject to QA/QC procedures, it is of high enough quality that it will meet NOAA information quality standards. Gleason also explained the process for correction of information.

Committee discussion followed Gleason's presentation noting that there could be a potential impact to the FIN and the ACCSP. Committee members discussed the possibility of posting methodologies and standard operating procedures on FIN, ACCSP, and partner websites. Gleason noted that a checklist has been developed for NMFS and he would make that available to anyone needing to go through documentation procedures. G. Davenport reported that Susan Molina of the Southeast Fisheries Science Center and Mike Justin of Regional Office are also available for assistance.

D. Donaldson asked Committee members if there was a need to develop further documentation on QA/QC procedures for commercial data collection activities. After lengthy Committee discussion, **R. Lukens moved to refer the issue of QA/QC to the Geographic Subcommittee and have them make a recommendation to the FIN Committee. The motion**



**was seconded and passed unanimously.** T. Gleason will forward his checklist to D. Donaldson for distribution to Committee members.

### **Presentation of Preliminary Results of Detailed Effort Pilot Survey**

G. Davenport of NOAA Fisheries in Miami reported on the results of the Detailed Effort Pilot Survey and gave examples of their work and what it is used for. This presentation pertains specifically to Louisiana since they are using the trip ticket system. Davenport included slides in his presentation and first showed the life cycle of shrimp in the upper Gulf of Mexico, noting that 79% of shrimp caught in the United States are from the Gulf of Mexico. Davenport then showed the gear utilized in both the inshore and offshore Louisiana shrimp fishery as well as the different type boats. Davenport discussed the NOAA Fisheries port agent field offices, the number of agents at each location, and the grid system for the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean.

Davenport explained that there are two components involved with shrimp data collection. The landings information is the dealer portion and is basic information about the catch. The interview information which shows the details of the catch is recorded on trip tickets which the port agents record when conducting the interview.

Davenport discussed problems collecting interviews, noting that although it is mandated by federal law, it is based on cooperation from the industry. Several things affect industry cooperation including agent rapport, federal and state regulations and fees, permits, TEDS/BRDS, reporting requirements, shrimp prices, fuel prices, confusion over federal relief funds, and other federal and state agencies. Davenport emphasized the importance of more interviews, with a target rate of 10% of offshore trips.

D. Donaldson noted that this pilot survey was undertaken in order to test this methodology to see if it gives an accurate account of detailed effort, however Committee members agreed that a higher level of sampling would be required. It was noted that additional funds are not available for collection of detailed effort. The Committee discussed various ways to improve the number of interviews, including outreach, incentives, and utilizing TIP interviews. G. Davenport will continue to improve the percentage of interviews, and J. Shepard noted that he would be able to assist with interviews.

### **Discussion About Future of Data Collection and Management Activities**

J. Shepard noted that there are two states that do not have trip tickets at this time and asked if it is possible that they will in the future. R. Lukens noted that the problem is part political and part lack of funds and suggested that the time to address the issue is when a new timeline is developed. D. Donaldson suggested setting up a facilitated session in 2004 in order to provide direction for FIN for the next five years and to outline issues and problems. This facilitated session would be held in conjunction with the 2004 FIN meeting. The Committee agreed to this suggestion.

### **Discussion of Strategies for Implementation of Registration Tracking Module**

D. Donaldson provided the Committee with a matrix developed by the Registration Tracking Work Group for vessels, fishermen, and dealers. Donaldson noted that in order for the registration tracking module to work, the elements listed on the matrix need to be collected by state and federal agencies. Donaldson reported that at the last Data Management Subcommittee (Geographic Subcommittee) meeting the issue of birth date as a unique identifier was raised and there was concern expressed that getting the birth date would be a problem. Donaldson stressed

the importance of developing strategies to implement the collection of data for the registration tracking module, noting how useful it would be in the distribution of funds for shrimp fishermen.

Since using birth date as a unique identifier may be problematic, the Committee discussed alternative numbering systems and various other issues relating to unique identifiers. D. Donaldson suggested that the agencies not currently collecting birth date explore the issue and the problems involved and have this subject on the agenda for the Geographic Subcommittee which is scheduled to meet in October. M. Osborn requested that the ACCSP be involved in the Geographic Subcommittee meeting. The Committee also agreed to provide any available vessel or dealer information.

### **Review and Approval of 2002 FIN Annual Report**

The Committee was provided with copies of the 2002 FIN Annual Report. After reviewing the report, **S. Holiman moved to approve the 2002 FIN Annual Report. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.** D. Donaldson stated that the Annual Report will be printed and distributed to Committee members and will be posted on the GSMFC website.

### **Subcommittee and Work Group Reports**

**Commercial Port Sampler Meetings** - (Attachment A) D. Donaldson reported that two port sampler meetings are held annually, the Gulf of Mexico samplers and the Caribbean samplers. These meetings were implemented several years ago in order to have the samplers get together and discuss various issues of concern.

Donaldson reported that the Caribbean samplers met in Miami this year. They visited several dealers in the Miami area to see how samplers operated in the U.S. Several matters were discussed including stock assessments being conducted. Donaldson reported that the group of samplers developed several recommendations to improve the quality of the data and these were approved by this Committee via mail ballot since the Caribbean partners felt the need to move forward as quickly as possible. Donaldson noted that the U.S. Virgin Islands took exception to the way some of these recommendations were developed and they do not feel that this group was the appropriate one to make these recommendations. Donaldson also noted that Puerto Rico was appreciative of the recommendations which were intended to improve the quality of the data.

Donaldson reported that another recommendation by the Caribbean port samplers was the development of outreach meetings for fishermen. It was suggested that a letter be written to the Caribbean Fishery Management Council (CFMC) or Sea Grant in order to solicit their support.

**R. Lukens moved to accept the Caribbean port samplers meeting report and to have staff write a letter to the CFMC. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

D. Donaldson reported that the Gulf of Mexico port samplers meeting included state and federal samplers from the five Gulf states, approximately 50 people. The FIN draft bycatch module was presented to the port samplers at the meeting. A recommendation was made that both state and federal port samplers begin looking at the possibility of collecting basic bycatch information using existing programs such as TIP. Committee discussion followed Donaldson's report and **P. Campbell moved to accept the Gulf of Mexico port samplers meeting report. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

**Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee** - (Attachment B) D. Donaldson stated that the Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee is essentially the same as the GSMFC Data

Management Subcommittee which meets twice a year. Donaldson reported that two issues were raised which the FIN Committee will discuss later in the meeting: social/economic data collection, and artificial reefs.

**R. Lukens moved to accept the Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee report. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

Artificial Reef Work Group - (Attachment C) D. Donaldson reported that data had been collected on the MRFSS in the past on fishing at artificial reefs in the Gulf of Mexico. The Artificial Reef Subcommittee made a recommendation that this question be added back to the MRFSS since it has been 10 years since it has been collected and data collection began in January 2003. The report shows the amount of activity around oil and gas structures and artificial reefs broken down by state, and east and west coasts of Florida. This study will continue until December 2003 and G. Bray will give a presentation on the results at the next FIN Committee meeting. S. Atran requested that the results be forwarded to the GMFMC. G. Bray will give a presentation to the Council possibly at their May 2004 meeting. **K. Cuevas moved to accept the Artificial Reef Work Group report. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

Biological/Environmental Work Group - (Attachment D) D. Donaldson reported that initially the work group was going to work with the Highly Migratory Species (HMS) group on registering fishing tournaments. Since this didn't work out, the FIN Committee agreed to send this issue back to the Biological/Environmental Work Group. The work group developed a recommendation that the states explore the possibility of registering all tournaments within their jurisdiction except the ones registered by HMS. Before this can be done, all tournaments must be identified. The Committee discussed policy in each state, whether legislative action would be necessary, and what would be required to have all tournaments registered, as well as the value of tournament data. **R. Lukens moved to have state Committee representatives check on what would be required to implement registering tournaments and be prepared to give a report at the Geographic Subcommittee meeting in October. The Geographic Subcommittee can then make a recommendation to the FIN Committee. The motion was seconded and passed with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council voting No.**

D. Donaldson reported that the issue of water body codes versus hydrologic unit codes (HUC) was raised in order to make FIN more compatible with invasive species activities. Donaldson reported that the Biological/Environmental Work Group did not believe that there was a compelling reason to change the coding system and recommended that the FIN stay with existing water body codes. There are also compatibility issues between FIN and ACCSP which would necessitate going from a four digit code to an eight digit code and reloading all the data in both systems. After Committee discussion, **P. Campbell moved to accept the recommendation of the Biological/Environmental Work Group and the report. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

D. Donaldson reported that the Biological/Environmental Work Group was asked to examine the issue of private access site sampling. The work group discussed various ways to accomplish this task and recommended that several questions be added to the Random Digit Dialing Telephone Survey (RDD) regarding use of private access sites. These questions could be added at no cost. During Committee discussion, M. Osborn noted that similar questions had been asked on the MRFSS for quite some time and T. Sminkey suggested defining private access sites and rewording some questions. R. Lukens suggested that the existing data in the RDD database be examined to determine if these questions are sufficient or if modifications to the

questions would be required. **K. Cuevas moved to review the existing data in the Random Digit Dialing Telephone Survey and look into the possibility of refining the question in order to have less confusion on the part of the respondent. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

**Data Collection Work Group** - (Attachment E) D. Donaldson reported that two issues were raised by the work group: the bycatch module, and recommendations regarding Puerto Rico's data collection program. The recommendations for Puerto Rico were previously discussed in the section on Port Samplers meetings.

Donaldson noted since FIN has been focusing on commercial and recreational catch and effort, bycatch has not yet been addressed. Now that the catch and effort programs are underway, this would be an appropriate time to address bycatch. Donaldson noted that much of the bycatch work developed by the ACCSP is being utilized by FIN. Donaldson reported that the recommendation of the work group is for FIN to adopt the ACCSP at-sea observer program data elements and to utilize the TIP bycatch component to identify and prioritize fisheries for at-sea sampling.

The Committee discussed which fisheries currently have bycatch activities and questioned the usefulness of TIP bycatch data. M. Osborn explained how the ACCSP handles collection of bycatch data and noted that the at-sea observer program is the best method but also the most expensive. D. Donaldson noted that the FIN identified the absence or presence of bycatch for a particular species and a particular gear. The Committee also discussed bycatch monitoring activities in both the Atlantic and the Gulf. M. Osborn noted that a draft Report Card on bycatch is due in mid-June with an implementation plan due by August. After lengthy Committee discussion, R. Lukens made a recommendation to contact Phil Steele of NMFS and ask if FIN can be involved in the process and if so can we include state fisheries that are not under federal management. J. Shepard noted that the ACCSP has always taken the lead on bycatch and suggested that the FIN wait for their at-sea observer program.

**J. O'Hop moved to adopt the ACCSP at-sea observer program as the method for collecting bycatch information in the Gulf of Mexico. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

**P. Campbell moved to accept R. Lukens recommendation to contact P. Steele to see if FIN can be involved in the process. If so, can state fisheries that are not under federal management be included. The motion was seconded and passed with GMFMC abstaining.**

D. Donaldson provided members of the Committee with copies of a letter from the Gulf Restoration Network concerning bycatch. The Committee directed staff to respond to this letter.

**Data Collection Plan Work Group** - (Attachment F) D. Donaldson reported that the Data Collection Plan Work Group met the previous day and had a very productive meeting. They reviewed activities from 2002 and 2003 as well as targets for 2004. The work group agreed to stay with existing sampling targets until at least 2004. At that time a stock assessment for red snapper will be conducted. Donaldson reported that concerns about otolith processing were raised. R. Lukens stated that if otolith collection was going to be increased, then the capacity for processing otoliths also needed to be increased. Lukens noted that the issue of quality control was also raised at the work group meeting since a number of different labs would be processing otoliths from the same species. Lukens reported that the work group discussed increasing the capacity of existing labs or have a regional otolith processing facility that would handle the overflow from existing labs. J. O'Hop suggested another alternative may be to have certain labs

concentrate on the species where they have expertise. Lukens reported that the work group also discussed the need to address species other than the five which have been selected.

For-Hire Work Group - (Attachment G) D. Donaldson reported that the For-Hire Work Group will meet tomorrow afternoon, June 5, 2003. One of the topics of discussion will be field collection activities. The work group will compare effort estimates using the NMFS logbook and the Charter Boat Telephone Survey. July 2003 had been targeted to begin making some phone calls however field sampling will not begin at this time due to limited funds.

Social/Economic Work Group - (Attachment H) The Committee was provided with a Statement of Work for social/economic work with inshore shrimp fisheries. D. Donaldson reported that this was submitted to the Coastal Oceans Program, however it did not get funded. Donaldson noted that the Social/Economic Work Group had been charged with developing a pilot study to collect commercial social/economic data. It has been difficult to get a proposal developed and the work group felt that this matter should be discussed by the FIN Committee. R. Lukens noted that the need for this information has been established in federal law and all agencies, however no money is available at this time for a social/economic study. Lukens stated that the FIN has brought a focus to this issue and money needs to be made available within the various agencies to allow researchers to do this work. S. Holiman noted the difficulty in developing a program when no funds are available. Rita Curtis of NMFS reported that the Southeast Region has developed a five year social science strategy and without that plan they would never have gotten funding. The Committee discussed several areas of difficulty in developing a social/economic plan, including the fact that FIN is dominated by fisheries biologists and most states do not have sociologists or economists on staff. Several suggestions were made including using the facilitated session at the next FIN meeting to address the social/economic situation or having a presentation by someone from the NMFS social/economic team address the FIN Committee. After discussing this issue, the Committee agreed to ask the S-FFMC for direction on the social/economic issue.

R. Curtis addressed the Committee and reported that her office is planning on doing a national employment survey of commercial fishermen and the for-hire sector. Their office is developing a vessel frame for federal fisheries and they are asking for assistance from the states in developing a frame for state registered commercial vessels in the Gulf of Mexico. Curtis noted that they hope to have the frame developed by the end of August. The states agreed to assist R. Curtis in developing a vessel frame.

### **Operations Plan**

The FIN Committee was provided with a list detailing the status of activities for 2003. (Attachment I) This document showed that all activities in the 2003 Operations Plan had been addressed. The Committee reviewed the list and corrections were made.

The Committee reviewed the 2004 FIN Operations Plan and additional activities discussed at this meeting were added. Changes were made in work group and subcommittee listings as well. **P. Campbell moved to approve the 2004 FIN Operations Plan as amended. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

### **Discussion of 2004 FIN Funding Priorities**

Committee members were provided with guidelines on the funding decision process for FIN and a list of items for consideration in 2004. D. Donaldson noted that there are no new funds available for additional tasks and most of the items on the list are ongoing activities.

Donaldson reported that the list was generated from activities conducted last year as well as discussions in work group meetings and the last FIN meeting. Donaldson noted that the prioritized list will be forwarded to the S/FFMC and they will make the final decision on which items will be in the Cooperative Agreement for 2004.

Donaldson asked Committee members for any items to be added to the list at this time. After Committee discussion, two items were added; trip ticket implementation for Texas, and economic data collection for inshore shrimp.

During the process of prioritizing items for funding in 2004, Donaldson asked if it would be possible for Texas to hire port samplers instead of using independent contractors. P. Campbell responded that it would not be possible in 2004. Donaldson also noted that two independent contractors for menhaden sampling would be included in the Louisiana budget.

The Committee then prioritized the list as follows:

#### **High Priority**

Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities (ongoing)

Collecting, Managing and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data (ongoing)

Charter Boat Survey Offshore Texas (ongoing)

Head Boat Port Sampling in Texas, Louisiana, and Florida (ongoing)

Implementation of For-Hire Telephone Survey (effort) and Field Sampling (catch) (new)

Gulf Menhaden Port Sampling (ongoing)

Development and Implementation of FIN Data Management System (ongoing)

Trip Ticket Program Implementation and Operations in Mississippi (ongoing)

Trip Ticket Program Implementation and Operations in Texas (new)

Trip Ticket Program Operations in Alabama (ongoing)

Trip Ticket Program Operations in Louisiana (ongoing)

Recreational/Commercial Biological Sampling (ongoing)

Collection of Social/Economic Data of Inshore Shrimp Fishery (new)

#### **Medium Priority**

Collection of Detailed Effort for Commercial Fisheries

Pilot Study for Bycatch Data Collection

#### **Low Priority**

Biological Sampling for Additional Species

**R. Lukens moved to accept the prioritized list of items for consideration in 2004. The motion was seconded and passed with the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council voting No.**

D. Donaldson noted that this list will be forwarded to the S/FFMC with a description of each activity. For each item that is ranked High, Donaldson stated that he will need a statement of work and associated budget by July 11, 2003.

#### **Time Schedule and Location for Next Meeting**

D. Donaldson noted that every three years the FIN meeting is held in the Caribbean, alternating between the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. Since the last Caribbean meeting was held in the U.S. Virgin Islands, the Committee agreed that the meeting will be held during the first week of June in eastern Puerto Rico. Donaldson also noted that a facilitated session will be held in conjunction with the FIN meeting.

### **Election of Vice-Chairman**

Since J. Shepard is Vice-Chairman, he will become Chairman and P. Campbell was elected Vice-Chairman for a two year term.

### **Other Business**

C. Denson noted that anyone fishing outside of Alabama, except for shrimp, can bring their catch in and sell it as long as they are permitted or licensed in the area they fished. The problem is that they are not in Alabama's license database and they are characterized as an unknown fisherman. It has been suggested that Alabama create a separate database for these fishermen, however it would be difficult to verify whether they were legal. Denson asked the Committee for a possible solution to this problem.

J. O'Hop stated that the Florida license database can be accessed through the internet or the GSMFC website. Bob Sadler of NMFS stated that he would also be able to help provide information. There was discussion on whether the individual states would provide this information or if it should be forwarded to the FIN database. Committee members agreed that until M. Sestak returns from active duty with the Army, C. Denson can contact each state for information on these fishermen.

C. Lilyestrom reported that for the past three years, Puerto Rico has been trying to get their fisheries regulations approved. Recently W. Hogarth and R. Crabtree of NMFS met with the Secretary and discussed the importance of compatible regulations. The implication for FIN is that Puerto Rico will be allowed to implement marine recreational fishing licenses.

**There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:15 a.m.**



Caribbean Port Sampler Meeting  
Meeting Summary  
October 2-3, 2002  
Miami, Florida

Attachment A

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. and the following people were present:

Willie Ventura, USVIDFW, St. Croix, VI  
Hector Riveria, USVIDFW, St. Croix, VI  
Toby Tobias, USVIDFW, St. Croix, VI  
Stacy Albritton, USVIDFW, St. Thomas, USVI  
Ruth Gomez, USVIDFW, St. Thomas, USVI  
Shenell Gordon, USVIDFW, St. Thomas, USVI  
Hector Lopez Pelet, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR  
Luis Riveria, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR  
Wilfredo Torres, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR  
Walter Irizarry, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR  
Jesus Leon, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR  
Daniel Matos, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR  
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Josh Bennett, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Pam Eyo, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Monica Valle, UM, Miami, FL  
Nancie Cummings, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved with the addition of discussion of the queen conch and yellowtail snapper assessments on the second day.

Status of ComFIN

D. Donaldson gave an overview of the Fisheries Information Network (FIN). He stated that FIN consists of two major components: ComFIN and RecFIN (SE). He discussed the various activities that FIN has recently undertaken including collection of recreational data, implementation of trip tickets, collection of detailed effort from commercial fisheries, biological sampling, and implementation of the FIN data management system (DMS). He stated that trip ticket programs implemented in states except Mississippi and Texas. Mississippi has implemented oyster and bait shrimp and are working on other components of the commercial fisheries in the future. Texas is still evaluating effectiveness of trip ticket program to collect commercial data in their state. One of the innovations is the implementation of electronic trip ticket reporting. Through a contractor, GSMFC has been working with dealers in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida to allow for the electronic reporting of data. This is a more efficient and less time consuming method for collecting the data. There could be as many as 120 commercial dealers on-line by December 2002. A pilot study regarding the collection of detailed effort is being conducted in Louisiana. Information such as multiple gear and area fished, quantity of gear, days at sea, number of crew, fishing time, etc. are being collected and



NMFS is examining these data and will be presenting the results to FIN in the near future. The FIN DMS is currently on-line and it contains a variety of commercial and recreational data as well as biological samples and SEAMAP (fishery-independent) data. Users must complete the appropriate forms and can access both confidential and non-confidential data.

Recently, the

Data Collection Work Group met in Puerto Rico to discuss development of bycatch module and develop recommendations for improvement of Puerto Rico's commercial data collection programs. From that meeting, several recommendations were developed including providing a system to track fishermen that will ensure reporting of the necessary data; capture data on a trip level and implement the Data Memorandum of Agreement that will allow access to FIN DMS.

#### Presentation of Caribbean Commercial Data Collected under TIP

J. Bennett stated that NMFS currently houses Puerto Rico landings and Trip Interview Program (TIP) from 1983 and U.S. Virgin Islands landings from July 1986 and TIP data from 1983. Recent historical data for USVI has been received but not reviewed. All data are currently under review and edit to ensure data sets match between NMFS and Caribbean and that the data are "the best possible data" under the Magnuson Act. He reviewed the processing cycle for Puerto Rico landings data. There are a variety of error checks run on the data including checking for incorrect codes, identifying duplicate records and others. The data are then sent, via e-mail, to NMFS and loaded on their main computer. Once the data are loaded, summary reports are provided to Puerto Rico Department of Environmental and Natural Resources (PRDENR), although this is not automatic and consistency needs to be improved. Some recent improvements include updating the Puerto Rico to NMFS species code cross-reference table, elimination of duplicate records, and attempting to resolve effort data problems. J. Bennett then outlined the processing cycle for the U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) landings data. The data are submitted on an annual basis to the NMFS. The NMFS then reviews the data and runs a variety of error checks including invalid codes, characters present in numeric fields, dates that fall outside the range of the fishing year, and pounds that are too small or large. This error checking process is a recent improvement. Once NMFS identifies these possible errors, the USVI then reviews the data and make the appropriate changes. The revised data are sent back to the NMFS.

He outlined some of the problems with the USVI data. The table formats need to be unified to the best extent possible. All tables from similar forms must contain the same columns with the same headings and column width and format. Codes must be unified. A database management system such as Access needs to be eventually implemented in the USVI to maintain the integrity of the data.

J. Bennett then discussed the processing cycle for the Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands TIP data. The data are validated by Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands personnel prior to being sent to NMFS. Although there are validations, improvements can be made in this area. The TIP online system will have more extensive validations in the system. He provided some suggested for improving the quality of data collected under TIP. Samplers need to check entered data with the original data sheets to ensure minimal data entry mistakes. A series of validation tables that contain length-weight regression data has been developed and the plan is to use these tables as an initial outlier checks. It is necessary to have better communication between NMFS and the Caribbean regarding load reports and error listings. And Puerto Rico should submit fishermen id numbers with their data so that the TIP data can be better matched with the landings.

### Overview of Gulf of Mexico Port Samplers Data Collection Methods

G. Davenport discussed the mission of NOAA fisheries which is to protect and preserve the nation's living marine resources through scientific research, fisheries management, law enforcement and habitat conservation. He provided a brief history of the TIP that was started in 1985 to collect information from commercial fisheries throughout the southeast coastal states. He outlined the procedures for conducting an interview and highlighted the major fisheries in the Southeast which include shrimp/oyster trawls, hook and line vessels targeting king mackerel and grouper/snapper, longline vessels targeting swordfish, shark and deep and shallow water reef fish, gillnet vessels targeting king and Spanish mackerel, menhaden/bait fish and shark, and trap vessels targeting lobsters, blue, golden and stone crabs and fish. He provided a detailed description of each of these fisheries regarding target species, type of gear, areal coverage, etc. He then discussed the TIP sampling methods which included meeting the vessel at the dock; interviewing the captain for trip information; identifying species; measuring length and weight frequencies; determining sex of fish and collecting gonads; and extracting otoliths. He reviewed the steps for entry of the data and submitting the hard parts to the NMFS laboratory. He outlined the sampling tools used by the port samplers. They included calipers, measuring boards, knives and tweezers for extracting otoliths. He then provided an overview of otolith extraction and analysis. Otoliths are bone structures found in all fish and help maintain balance in the fish. There are two types of otolith processing: using whole otolith and using sectioned otoliths. If an otolith is thin enough, it can be processed whole. The otolith is placed in a petri dish and submerged in clove oil. A fibro-optic light is used to count the annuli. When an otolith is too thick, it is sectioned and the section is read. The reading of otoliths is done using a microscope.

### Field Sampling

In the afternoon, the group visited various dealers and fishermen to observe fishing activities in the Miami area. The activities seen included spiny lobster, golden crab and reef fish fisheries.

**The meeting was recessed at 11:30 a.m.**

**October 3, 2002**

**The meeting reconvened at 9:00 a.m.**

### Field Sampling

In the morning, the group toured that NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center. They visited with various personnel and discussed a variety of issues including the turtle program, data management, marine mammal strandings, habitat assessment and other issues.

### Discussion of Queen Conch Stock Assessment

M. Valle presented a data update regarding the U.S. Caribbean queen conch fishery. The objectives of the study were to describe the process to use commercial landings data in stock assessment which included a description of the commercial landings data from Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands (possibilities and limitations); description of the methods used to organize, edit/adjust and summarize the data; description of the approach used for analysis of the queen conch fisheries in the U.S. Caribbean; and description of the major findings. She provided some background information regarding the species, distribution and study area and description of the fisheries in Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands. The data sources for these data included commercial fisheries information (landings statistics, fishers lists, TIP data, etc.), recreational fisheries data (MRFSS in Puerto Rico 2000), fishery-dependent and -independent survey, and other research. The U.S. Virgin Islands has been collecting commercial data via a mandatory reporting system since 1974. The U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Fish and Wildlife collect fishermen reports on a monthly basis. Fishing licenses are renewed upon receipt of the previous' years fishing reports. The best available data for U.S. Virgin Islands is from July 1986-December 1999. The goal for handling and analyzing the queen conch data was to assemble a single dataset with one record per trip to derive time-series of catch and effort by island. In order to accomplish this task, all datasets (3) needed to be combined and some assumptions were made during the editing process. It was assumed that all fields were equal in the duplicate records. The records with blanks or zeros for landings and date as well as outliers were removed. Records with no ID code were assumed to be one trip. And the ISLAND field was derived from the AREA LANDED field. The three datasets were combined and common fields were preserved (although that resulted in loss of individual trip details) and the final dataset consisted of total/conch/other species landing per trip/record. A subset of positive queen conch trips was used to calculate an estimation of catch and effort in directed and non-directed sectors. Some of the limitations and problems with the data included incompatible formats and levels of resolution, duplicate/triplicate data files per fishing year or incomplete/missing years/months, no deadlines for modifying the data, no standard criteria to edit/adjust data, limited or no verification of data, and limited potential for further analyses (for queen conch). She provided some results of her analysis regarding queen conch in the U.S. Virgin Islands but because of the data limitations, the analysis was very basic and varied among islands. In Puerto Rico, the fisheries statistics program began in 1967. Trip tickets are collected by on a voluntary basis from fishermen, buyers and associations. Port agents visit 88 fishing centers in 42 coastal municipalities around Puerto Rico to collect the data. Data are computerized and processed by Puerto Rico and then sent to NMFS. The data structure for the trip tickets has been consistent since the program's inception. The best available information is the commercial landings statistics from 1983-2000. The goal for handling and analyzing the queen conch data in Puerto Rico was the same as it was for U.S. Virgin Islands. A problem encountered was that the trips reported do not always equate to a single trip. There were several trips reported on a single ticket when multiple species were fished. The steps in the analysis included assembling a single dataset (83-00), edit and split into a new dataset (landings/species) that allowed for the merging of catch of different species under the same trip. Editing such as removal of outliers duplicated, zeros, and correcting of coding errors was conducted on the dataset. The next step was to summarize the dataset by conch/other/total landings. Single-trip records were extracted to derive an effort estimate as well as extracting a queen conch dataset to derive an estimation of catch and effort for the directed and non-directed fisheries. It was noted that updating, quality control and

data validations are currently being conducted on the data. There were no major limitations or problems with the data. She then presented some results of the analysis and was able to provide some preliminary stock assessment results and projections for Puerto Rico. The conclusions of the presentation were it was a very elaborate process to get the data into shape for the stock assessment; commercial landings statistics in the U.S. Caribbean are limited but have a large potential for analysis; descriptive statistics provided a basic understanding of the trends and patterns in the queen conch fisheries; stock assessment analysis showed current population status and exploitation patterns; and further updating, editing, adjusting, and quality control of data is needed, particularly in the U.S. Virgin Islands. She presented some recommendations for the improvement of the data that will allow for more robust stock assessments to be conducted. The recommendations included providing species identification to a finer level of detail, collect more detail on fishing effort, gear, area fished, etc, encourage fishermen to complete all fields on the catch forms, encourage more frequent submission of the catch reports (monthly vs. yearly), develop and implement standard a data management system, quality control/validation processes, and transfer protocols. The group discussed some of the recommendations provided in the presentation. G. Davenport suggested that to improve the quality of the data, it would be beneficial to have U.S. Virgin Islands personnel conduct the quality control/validations on the data. Since these personnel are the ones collecting it, the result would be higher quality data with fewer errors, which would make it quicker and easier to process. The group asked the U.S. Virgin Islands how to make these changes. T. Tobias stated that a decision like that needs to be made by the U.S. Virgin Island directorship.

#### Discussion of Yellowtail Snapper Assessment

N.Cummings stated that NOAA is mandated to conduct stock assessments. There are several types of data that are needed for stock assessments. Annual productions (total catch), sociological information (regarding fishing communities) and relative effort by fisheries are needed to conduct these assessments. It is important to have good fielding sampling, which allows for better species composition determination. Better species composition provides analysts to develop trends in the various fisheries, which is very important for management purposes. In addition to composition, size distribution data are needed to examine growth over the various fisheries. This allows samplers to look at where each species group is being landed and allow for representative sampling of effort. Fisheries managers are looking at reef fishes in the Caribbean. They are identifying areas where there is incomplete or missing data and are conducting a comprehensive review of reef fishes in Puerto Rico. From this exercise, a stock assessment of yellowtail snapper will be conducted in the future. The model that will be used to conduct this assessment will rely on fishery-independent data and will be based on abundance. It will probably not be an age-based assessment.

#### Development of Recommendations

During the previous presentations, the group identified several areas of data deficiencies. After some discussion, the group believed it would be beneficial to develop some recommendations to present to FIN regarding data issues in the Caribbean. **The following recommendations were developed and will be presented to FIN (via mail ballot):**

- **U.S. Virgin Islands need to utilize a data base management software such as FoxPro, dBase, Microsoft Access, etc. This will provide a**

better method for transferring the data as well as make it easier to establish routine data checks;

- U.S. Virgin Islands need to establish a standard data format for the data files as well as the individual fields and utilize only this structure. This will enable analysts to use more of the data for assessments and reduce the amount of time needed to prepare the data for assessments;
- A deadline for updating the data needs to be established for the data. This deadline will be established a date for when the data are "final";
- Standard criteria for reviewing the data need to be established;
- Routine verification of the data (checking for coding errors, outliers, duplicates, missing values, etc.) needs to be established. This will allow for "cleaner" data to be delivered and provide a more robust dataset for analysis. This task can be facilitated by utilizing a database management software (see above recommendation);
- The frequency of data submission needs to be monthly vs. yearly. By having monthly submission of data, potential errors have a better chance of being identified and corrected since there is a short recall period. The implementation of this recommendation could be accomplished via adding it to the NMFS/Caribbean Cooperative Statistics cooperative agreements;
- Establish mandatory reporting of biological statistics data. Again, this could be accomplished via adding it to the NMFS/Caribbean Cooperative Statistics cooperative agreements;
- Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands need to add trip ticket number/trip number into their databases. This will allow analysts to link all catch with a particular catch report and;
- There needs to be territorial support (financial) for the collection of commercial fisheries data in the Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands.

The group then discussed the importance of outreach to the fishing community. **It was decided that outreach meetings for users should be established in the Caribbean.** In order to conduct these meetings, dedicated funding would be needed. A representative would provide an overview of the management process and explain the importance of the data in terms of managing the resources. It was suggested that outside agencies, such as the Caribbean Fishery Management Council and Sea Grant, needed to be involved in this activity. **The group recommended that a letter be written to the Caribbean Fishery Management Council and Sea Grant regarding this concept and solicit their support.**

#### Discussion of Topics for Next Meeting

The group decided that the next meeting should be held in the eastern portion of Puerto Rico

and be held during the first week of October 2003. The rationale for meeting in this area is that it will allow the group to observe fishing activities and practices in some new areas of the island that have not been sampled in the past. D. Donaldson then asked the group for input regarding the next port samplers meeting. It was suggested that an update on the yellowtail snapper assessment be discussed at the next meeting. N. Cummings stated that work should be completed on the assessment and a presentation could be given at the meeting. D. Donaldson stated that he would develop a draft agenda prior to the meeting and distribute it to everyone for comment.

**Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.**

Port Samplers Meeting  
Meeting Summary  
November 13 and 14, 2002  
St. Petersburg, Florida

David Donaldson of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. The following were present:

Pete Antosh, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Chuck Armstrong, GSMFC, Pascagoula, MS  
Danica Bailey, LDWF, New Orleans, LA  
Laura Baird, FFWCC, Melbourne, FL  
Rick Beaver, FFWCC, Marathon, FL  
Josh Bennett, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Jay Boulet, NMFS, Chalmette, LA  
Beth Bourgeois, GSMFC, New Iberia, LA  
Pamela Brown Eyo, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Lew Bullock, FFWCC, St. Petersburg, FL  
Graham Cole, FFWCC, Jacksonville, FL  
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Claudia Dennis, NMFS, New Smyrna Beach, FL  
Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Kit Doncaster, NMFS, Brownsville, TX  
Wendy Dyer, FFWCC, Marathon, FL  
Justin Esslinger, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Noel Estes, ADCNR, Dauphin Island, AL  
Debbie Fable, NMFS, Panama City, FL  
Ted Flowers, NMFS, Mobile, AL  
Michelle Gamby, NMFS, Tequesta, FL  
Gary Haddle, FFWCC, Jacksonville, FL  
Lisa Hallock, FFWCC, Port Charlotte, FL  
Chad Hanson, FFWCC, East Point, FL  
Brian Hardcastle, LDWF, Grand Isle, LA  
Tom Herbert, NMFS, Fort Myers, FL  
J. Koslak, FFWCC, St. Petersburg, FL  
Laura Lambremont, FFWCC, Tequesta, FL  
Jude LeDoux, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Albert Lefort, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Ed Little, NMFS, Key West, FL  
Linda Lombardi, NMFS, Panama City, FL  
Edie Lopez, NMFS, Brownsville, TX  
Pamela Machuga, NMFS, Key West, FL  
Anthony MacWhinnie, FFWCC, Pensacola, FL  
Karen Meador, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Lloyd Muccio, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Joe O'Hop, FFWCC, St. Petersburg, FL

Michelle Padgett, GSMFC, Freeport, TX  
Keith Roberts, NMFS, Galveston, TX  
Renee Roman, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Gary Rousse, NMFS, Golden Meadow, LA  
Eric Sander, FFWCC, Daytona, FL  
Jeff Sauer, FFWCC, Melbourne, FL  
Roy Spears, NMFS, Aransas Pass, TX  
Mandy Strano, LDWF, Lake Charles, LA  
Bryan Summerlin, FFWCC, Cedar Key, FL  
Linda Trahan, NMFS, Port Arthur, TX  
Bill Tucker, NMFS, Houma, LA  
June Weeks, GSMFC, Panama City Beach, FL

**Staff**

Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Madeleine Travis, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

**Approval of Agenda**

The agenda was approved as presented.

**Demonstration of TIP Data Entry Program**

Lloyd Muccio of NMFS in Miami gave a presentation to the port samplers on the new TIP data entry program explaining that the main motivation for re-designing TIP was that the ACCSP and FIN now require additional data that had not previously been collected. Muccio noted several other factors including Foxpro software losing support, manual data transmissions unreliability, and difficulty in keeping users synchronized using PC versions of the TIP program. Muccio noted that several options were considered before selecting web based applications. He noted some of the web's strengths including lower maintenance costs, ability to access data from anywhere, instantaneous updates, users always on the same application, and the Web being upgraded continuously. Weaknesses include user interface being weaker, entry is not as fast as client server or PC, requires an internet connection, and new languages for programming staff to learn. An outside contractor, Artech, was brought in to re-design the TIP program for ACCSP and FIN. Muccio noted that the presentation is version 1.0 which is a partial implementation of TIPONLINE and that sometime in January or February new users will have access to improved versions of the program agency by agency.

Muccio requested that the port samplers keep an open mind and give the new program a chance. He also requested that samplers let him know what they like and dislike about the program and also to make suggestions on how to improve it.

J. Bennett of NMFS in Miami demonstrated Oracle Portal to the port samplers. Bennett explained that each user would have control over his/her own data and the agency managers will have control over their own agency's data. One of the features of TIPONLINE is that each agency will be able to enter data using their own codes. Bennett then reviewed the screens detailing how an account would be set up including the administrator creating the agency, user, user profile, defaults, code tables, and customizing pages. At this point in the presentation, Bennett connected to the internet for a live demonstration of entering and retrieving data in



## TIPONLINE.

After demonstrating various data entry and retrieval situations, a question and answer period was conducted with the port samplers. Bennett noted that sampling requirements are changing as a result of standardization with the FIN and ACCSP. Several points were raised including:

- the need to go through two screens when entering species, length, and otoliths on one fish,
- why the tag number isn't the unique interview number plus 1, 2, 3, etc.,
- is there a possibility of dealing with special needs as in the case of lobsters,
- in the observation section there are three fields for length information and Florida samplers are currently taking four lengths for biosamples,
- on landings page one field is for quantity of fish - is it necessary to count all fish?
- is it possible to work offline?
- is data entered lost if internet connection is interrupted?
- how will sampler know interview tag number when sampling in the field?  
Will need the tag number to cross reference samples,
- need programming for multiple sampled fish,

Bennett then discussed data security noting that since the data is on the main server, backup is done on a regular basis and samplers will not lose data. Muccio explained that there will be a general data warehouse and TIP data will be included when funds become available. G. Davenport discussed security for federal samplers stating that a VPN will be established and in the future may be available to the states. Bennett noted that the data that the outside users access should reside with the FIN/ACCSP and if the user is not able to obtain the data they were seeking, they would have to go to the agency generating the data.

Bennett and Muccio suggested sending an e-mail to the samplers in order to have input from the samplers regarding changes being considered. Muccio noted that with the Web there will be incremental development and samplers will be able to indicate the order in which things are done. Discussion continued concerning various aspects of data entry and the use of FIN and/or agency codes. Bennett explained that when an agency code is entered it is cross referenced with a FIN code and the FIN code goes into the table. The group then discussed landings size and Bennett explained that the codes came from FIN/ACCSP and were shortened to fit the computer screen, but the definitions can be clarified. D. Donaldson suggested that the Standard Codes Committee review the codes for clarification. Problems with validation was discussed and Muccio noted that this is still being developed.

## **Status of Commercial Fisheries Information Network (ComFIN)**

D. Donaldson reviewed recent ComFIN activities noting that trip ticket programs are being operated and implemented in three of the Gulf states. Other ComFIN activities include the collection of detailed effort, biological sampling, as well as the implementation of the data management system.

Donaldson reported that trip ticket programs are operating in Florida, Alabama, and Louisiana. Mississippi collects information on oyster and bait shrimp and hopefully finfish will be added in the future. Texas is evaluating the effectiveness of a trip ticket program. Donaldson reported that a company in Gonzalez, Louisiana has developed a program for electronic reporting. FIN has a contract with them to work with dealers in Louisiana, Florida, Mississippi, and Alabama. This program is useful to the dealers since it can be used for inventory, accounting, etc. Donaldson noted that there are some dealers in Galveston, Texas who are interested in trying this program. Currently there are 70 dealers online, primarily in Louisiana, with the potential of 120 by the end of the year. Donaldson reported that a catch/effort pilot study collecting multiple gears is being conducted in Louisiana. G. Davenport will give a report on this pilot study at the 2003 FIN meeting.

Donaldson reported that trip ticket data is in the data management system as well as historical data back to 1984 (NMFS TIP information), menhaden data, and recreational data. Biological information and SEAMAP data are being worked on. The system is online as of July, 2002. Confidentiality forms are on the website and approval by state representatives is required to access confidential data.

Donaldson reported that the Data Collection Work Group has made some recommendations concerning the collection of bycatch information. It was recommended that the TIP program be utilized to collect qualitative information in order to prioritize fisheries for at-sea observers. The Work Group also recommended that this issue be discussed at this Port Samplers meeting.

## **Discussion of Bycatch Data Collection Methods**

The recommendations of the Data Collection Work Group were distributed to samplers. Donaldson noted that some bycatch information is being collected in Alabama. The Work Group requested feedback from the samplers on the feasibility of collecting bycatch information and whether this would be useful information. Bycatch was defined as anything caught and not targeted. Donaldson noted that for the present the TIP program could be used to collect bycatch information. Davenport noted that the offshore shrimp fishery has an ongoing bycatch data collection program. Part of the group discussion focused on the need to have outreach as part of the bycatch program since the support of industry is essential. Bennett noted that it would probably be best to put the questions on bycatch at the end of the interview. Several comments were made, including access to logbook bycatch data, use of discard codes or comments field in the TIP system, the fact that tuna, shark, and swordfish are not being interviewed, and the possibility that samplers can begin to ask bycatch questions which will make the transition easier to TIP online. It was suggested that samplers begin to ask fishermen if they would be willing, in the future, to give information on bycatch and what kind of information would they be able to provide. Species, quantity (estimate), area fished, and disposition are key areas to focus on. The samplers agreed that they would be able to begin asking questions and record answers in the comments field of the TIP interview. Donaldson stated that this information will be presented to the FIN Committee at their meeting in June 2003 and he will keep samplers informed of the

results.

### **Discussion of Otolith Processing**

Linda Lombardi of the NMFS Panama City Laboratory gave a presentation on otolith processing. Lombardi noted that the samples sent to the Lab can provide information to define overfishing for a certain stock and she stressed the importance of random samples since age structure models are very sensitive to that data. For some species, the Lab is aging five thousand or more samples per year. The sampling of hard parts began in the early 1980's and since 1998 there has been a dramatic increase in sampling. Lombardi noted that the Panama City Lab is mostly concerned with gag, red grouper, red snapper, and vermillion snapper based on the frequency of assessment.

Lombardi reported that the sources of their samples were from port samplers. 22,000 samples came to the Panama City Lab in 2001 with 81% collected by the TIP samplers, and others provided by the MRFSS, Beaufort head boat survey, NMFS scientific survey, and others. Lombardi then explained the tracking process used when samples are received at the Lab. An archive program was started in 1998 with over 90,000 samples. Some of those samples date back to the 1980's with approximately 70% of the samples being snapper. Lombardi then gave an overview of the methods and processing used at the Lab.

In closing, Lombardi stated that demand is always increasing but funds and resources are always in flux. She noted the need to be able to switch from one assessment species to another, to choose priority species, to divide the workload between federal, state, and other partners, and increase and improve communications. Lombardi then went online to the Lab website, demonstrated for samplers, and explained that an updated website would be online by the end of the month. A brief question and answer period followed the presentation.

### **Results of Fish Sampling Exercise**

J. O'Hop gave a brief summary on the fish sampling exercise conducted by the port samplers the previous day. O'Hop noted that for the most part the variance components that were measured did very well and were within the true variance of each box although the ranges were somewhat restricted. A brief discussion followed O'Hop's summary.

### **Review of State and Federal Data Collection Methods**

State and federal port samplers from each of the Gulf states gave a brief description of their daily routine and methods employed. Justin Esslinger of TPWD reported that samplers for each bay system go to local fish houses in order to collect fish lengths; snapper when in season and black drum. They have a reporting system that the fish houses submit monthly and they also have a monitoring program which involves gill nets. They collect bay trawl and Gulf trawl samples. There is a longline sampling program that is conducted in March and April as well as a pilot study using a video camera. Esslinger also gave an overview of their stocking program. J. Bennett noted that he would be interested in obtaining the size data being collected in Texas.

Keith Roberts, a NMFS port agent from Texas reported that he collects landings data from major commercial shrimp dealers. In January they do a process product survey; in February landings of red snapper are collected as well as quota monitoring for Texas and Louisiana, and TIP sampling.

In spring and summer information on shrimp landings is collected. Roberts noted that this year they started doing some redfish sampling with charter boats. J. Bennett noted that they are not

receiving gear information on landings in Texas.

Gary Rouse, a NMFS port agent from Louisiana reported that they conduct shrimp interviews in the south Louisiana area. Snapper landings are also collected and that work is done cooperatively with the LDWF sampler. There was a brief discussion on the need for outreach with Vietnamese fisherman due to the language barrier and distrust. Rouse also commented on the success of electronic reporting.

Albert Lefort stated that LDWF began collecting otoliths through the FIN program and the four species used were red snapper, greater amberjack, king mackerel, and southern flounder. Using commercial trip ticket information from the previous year they were able to compute totals for the year while recreational quotas were obtained from MRFSS data. Lefort noted that the otoliths collected for the FIN program are worked up at the Baton Rouge age and growth lab, and SportFIN otoliths are worked up at the Grand Terre Marine Lab. Lefort noted that Louisiana has a fresh products license which allows fishermen to sell their catch to the public and it is difficult to get accurate pricing data.

Chuck Armstrong of the Pascagoula Lab works Pascagoula, Mobile, and Pensacola. Since a quota on inshore flounder has been instituted this is monitored, as well as speckled trout and redfish. State and federal samplers share TIP sampling duties. Periodically menhaden are monitored. Armstrong noted that he does red drum sampling and edits 8 years worth of vessel data. Jude LeDoux of MDMR noted that there are four large fish houses on the Mississippi coast and they are very cooperative. TIP and FIN sampling are done at one of these fish houses. FAM ??? sampling is done using gill nets on four estuaries in Mississippi. Otoliths are pulled and are combined with otoliths from the commercial side. All otoliths are cataloged in the new laboratory. LeDoux and the two federal port samplers are responsible for red snapper sampling.

Noel Estes of ADCNR is the port sampler for Mobile County. Estes noted that since the implementation of the trip ticket program she visits from 20 to 25 seafood dealers each month where she collects trip tickets, delivers pre-printed trip tickets, and answer any questions. TIP data is collected from 4 or 5 fish houses, with red snapper, mullet, and southern flounder being the primary species. Estes also collects otoliths from red snapper and flounder.

Pete Antosh of ADCNR is the port sampler for Baldwin County. Antosh noted that he does TIP sampling 3 days a week, and the rest of the time works on the MRFSS survey and otolith extractions on flounder. He also takes TIP samples on mullet, sheepshead, and flounder.

Ted Flowers of NMFS Mobile office covers Escambia County in Florida and parts of Alabama. They are now utilizing the trip ticket system as a source of data. Flowers noted that most of his duties involve TIP sampling and redfish, as well as seasonal reports.

Federal and state samplers from Florida reported that in the panhandle they cover hook and line fisheries for vermillion snapper, red snapper and king mackerel. Both recreational and commercial sampling are done including TIP sampling, charter boat, MRFSS, the inshore and offshore shrimp fishery. From the panhandle to St. Petersburg trap fishing, long line, hook and line, shrimp trawls, bait fishing, TIP sampling, and shark are covered as well as traps. Another one of their duties is editing trip ticket data and collecting trip information and interviews for effort information. Fisheries in other parts of Florida are grouper, stone crab, and lobster. There was discussion on red grouper, which are not usually seen in the northern Gulf. This was probably a result of recent storms.

### **Other Business**

D. Donaldson requested agenda items for the next port samplers meeting which will be held in 2003. Donaldson asked port samplers to contact him, J. O'Hop, or G. Davenport with suggestions. After a brief discussion, it was agreed that the 2003 meeting would be held in November in either Miami or St. Petersburg, Florida.

Mark Godcharles of NMFS addressed the group and thanked them for the job they do. He suggested that the subject of closures could be a topic for the next meeting since quota management is so important to fisheries management.

**There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:00 noon.**

Attachment B

DATA MANAGEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE (GULF OF MEXICO GEOGRAPHIC SUBCOMMITTEE)  
MINUTES

Monday, October 14, 2002

Duck Key, Florida

Chairman Joe O'Hop called the meeting to order at 1:10 p.m. The following members and others were present:

Members

Joe O'Hop, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX  
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Joe Shepard, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Leslie Hartman, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Rick Leard (proxy for S. Atran), GMFMC, Tampa, FL

Staff

David Donaldson, FIN Data Program Manager  
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant

Others

Tony Lamberte, GMFMC, Tampa, FL  
Chris Dorsett, GNR, New Orleans, LA  
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved as written.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes for the meeting held on March 18, 2002 in Biloxi, Mississippi were approved as written.

Discussion of Florida Trip Ticket and Logbook Comparison Study

J. O'Hop stated that Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) was interested in comparing a one-ticket trip ticket program vs. a two-ticket program. After further examination, the group believed the best place to look at this issue was in Florida and compare the trip tickets and the vessel logbooks. There are some problems associated with this comparison since the NMFS permit system (for logbooks) is based on the vessel while the Florida trip ticket system is based on either an individual or a vessel. A NMFS port agent was

tasked with matching up the Florida trip ticket with an associated logbook. In some cases, they matched very well while other times the link was not as clear. Approximately 75% of the landings were matched up between the trip tickets and logbooks. After NMFS had matched up these two datasets, Florida also attempted to match records within the data. From this exercise, an additional 10% of the landings were matched up. The results of this matching showed that there were some major differences of how catches were reported between the two systems. In some cases, the information is more detailed on the logbooks vs. trip tickets while in other cases, the opposite is true.

#### Status of Detailed Effort Survey

G. Davenport reported that approximately 389 shrimp interviews were conducted in Louisiana from January to August 2002. There have been some problems with lack of cooperation in collecting the interviews, which is due, in part, to the low prices, roadside sales (retailing), and negative response to imports. Since there has been some problems with cooperation, there have been efforts to make sure samplers do not target only the fishermen who want to participate. The effort was mainly focused on offshore trips although some data on inshore trips has been collected. This activity should continue into 2003. D. Donaldson asked if any of the data have been analyzed and G. Davenport stated that plans are in the works to begin the analysis in the near future. It was noted that a presentation at the next FIN meeting in June 2003 could probably be arranged to look at some of the preliminary results. D. Donaldson stated that purpose of this exercise is to determine if this methodology will adequately capture the necessary data on detailed effort for all species. The reason for presenting it to FIN is for the FIN Committee to consider expanding the sampling effort to the other Gulf States and detailed effort can be collected throughout the Gulf of Mexico. It was noted that it might be useful have some NMFS-Galveston personnel at the FIN meeting to present this analysis to provide their perspective on this data collection activity.

#### State Participation in Outreach for the Reef Fish Data Collection Effort

T. Lamberte stated that the Council is involved in some social/economic data collection efforts that will be targeting reef fish and mackerel fishermen. A similar activity is currently being conducting on the South Atlantic but it was decided to delay the implementation in the Gulf so some outreach with the industry could be conducted. They are looking at beginning the data collection during January 2004. The data will be collected via existing NMFS logbooks and two types of economic data will be collected. The first type will be costs and earnings information about the various costs associated with trips. The other part will be an annual expenditures survey where 20% of the fishermen who participated in the cost and earnings section will be asked to complete an annual survey. The Council needs to conduct workshops in the Gulf of Mexico in order to solicit comments and input from the industry regarding this data collection effort. The Council would like to contract with the states to identify the key sites within each state to conduct these workshops as well as identify the key industry people to attend the meetings. These workshops would be moderated by Council staff with the presence of state personnel.

#### Status of Charter Boat Economic Add-on Survey

D. Donaldson stated that the charter boat economic add-on survey is going better than



expected. He distributed a summary of response rates for the survey. Most of the captains are participating in the survey on a routine basis. The exceptions are in Louisiana and the Florida Keys where the refusal rates are ~15% and ~30%, respectively. Although the high refusal rates are concerning, it is not surprising that they are high in these areas. It was noted that although the captains may be refusing to participate in the economic add-on, they are still providing data on their effort. There were concerns that the add-on survey would negatively affect the effort survey but that does not seem to be the case. J. O'Hop asked about the analysis of these data and when preliminary results would be available. D. Donaldson responded that these issues have not been addressed by the NMFS economic staff and this would be a good item to discuss at the upcoming wave meeting. D. Donaldson stated that he would keep the group informed about this issue.

#### Status of Biological Sampling Activities

D. Donaldson distributed a summary of otolith collections for the recreational and commercial fisheries. The summary presents the number of otoliths that have been collected as well as the targets, by species, mode, and state. As mentioned during the several state reports, there appears to be problems with obtaining red snapper otoliths in the private/rental mode. Overall, the collections are going well and most of the states are providing the tracking information on a timely basis. It was noted that as this process becomes more routine, the sending of separate tally forms might not be necessary provided that the agencies send the actual data regarding collection activities. In order to accomplish this, it is imperative that the agencies send in the data by the established deadlines. D. Donaldson noted that there is a backlog of data since a data entry program was not available until recently. He asked what the status of reducing the backlog for each state. Several of the states do have a backlog and D. Donaldson noted these backlogs needs to be eliminated as soon as possible. The other portion of this activity is the analysis of these otoliths. This information can be tracked through the actual data once it has been submitted. The states are at various stages of analyzing the otoliths and it was noted that they need to not only focus on the collection but on the analysis as well. One of the goals of this activity was to provide more ageing data for stock assessments and that entails both collection and analysis. **The group decided that status of biological sampling should be a standing agenda item and each state should provide what has been collected and processed, to date.** D. Donaldson stated that M. Sestak is working by J. Bennett to get the biological information that is collected by the federal port agents into the FIN DMS as well. J. O'Hop noted that there is the potential to have duplicate records in the system since state personnel collect otoliths via TIP. When Florida sends the data to the FIN DMS, the same records could be in the NMFS data that would be sent to the DMS. It was noted that there is a field in the database to allow for the identification of a duplicate record (collected under MRFSS, TIP, etc.) Therefore, when J O'Hop sends the data, if he does not include these records, this would prevent duplicate records from being entered. J. O'Hop suggested a different approach to the tracking processing. It would be a web-based system where samplers would enter the different types of biological information that were collected (otolith, spine, gonad, tissue sample, etc.) and the system would provide a tracking number for that specific part. This would allow for better tracking of the specimens. Although it seems a bit futuristic right now, it certainly has potential for the future.



#### Discussion of Adding Artificial Reef Question on Intercept Survey

D. Donaldson stated that at the recent FIN meeting, the TCC Artificial Reef Subcommittee made a recommendation that a question regarding use of artificial reefs during fishing activities be added to the MRFSS. The Artificial Reef Work Group met (via conference call) to work out the details of the specific wording of the question. The final wording of the question was presented to the group. The Work Group recommended that the question be added to the survey beginning in January 2003. However, it recently came to the group's attention that a conjoint study will be conducted in 2003 and probably will begin in wave 3 or 4. Although this was not the group had planned for, it actually would be beneficial to have both the artificial reef question and the conjoint study operating at the same time since it provide some additional information regarding the economic value of artificial reefs. The group discussed the wording of the question and various aspects of the question. It was noted that this question would not be asked of fishermen fishing from shore. The group discussed the differences between artificial vs. natural reefs. **After some discussion, the Subcommittee approved the wording of the question as written and the question should be added to the MRFSS, beginning in January 2003. The group also decided that the Artificial Reef Subcommittee needed to provide definitions of artificial and natural reefs.**

#### Discussion of New Approach to Collection of Social/Economic Data

D. Donaldson stated that the current process of developing data collection for social/economic data does not appear to be working. The Social/Economic Work Group has met for the last three years and has yet to develop a viable social/economic data collection program. The problem appears to be that FIN is attempting to force the collection of these data when there is not a real push within the agencies to collect this information. The impetus for all of the current activities under FIN had come from the state and/or federal agencies in FIN. This does not seem to be true for the social/economic data and it appears the FIN is trying to "force" this activity. It was noted that the framework for the collection of social/economic data (minimum data elements, methods, etc.) have been developed by FIN so the infrastructure is there for data collection. It was suggested the instead of developing another data collection activity, FIN could focus on provide feedback to existing data collection activities (logbook add-ons, offshore shrimp fisheries interviews, etc.) in terms of meeting the FIN social/economic standards. It was noted that the infrastructure for collection of these types of data is in place and when a partner wants to collect social/economic data, the proposed activities will be evaluated based on these standards. It was decided that this issue should be discussed by the FIN Committee in June 2003.

#### Discussion of Data Collection Work Group Report

D. Donaldson reported that the Data Collection Work Group met in September 2002 to begin the development of the FIN bycatch module. Since the ACCSP has done extensive work on this issue, the group believed they should not reinvent the wheel and develop something complete different than the ACCSP. The proposed program will utilize both quantitative and qualitative collection methods. The Work Group developed several recommendations. The first recommendation is to adopt the ACCSP at-sea observer program data elements (quantitative) as the FIN standard and work on interim solutions with TIP and logbook data (qualitative) collection to advance data quality until a full at-sea observer program is possible. The other recommendation is to utilize the TIP bycatch component to identify/prioritize fisheries for at-sea observer sampling. **The Subcommittee discussed these recommendations and agreed to**

**accept them.** The proposed data elements are attached. This issue will be further discussed at the FIN meeting in June 2003.

Election of Chairman

After some discussion, Page Campbell was elected Chairman and J. O'Hop was elected Vice Chairman.

**Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:50 p.m.**

DATA MANAGEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE (GULF OF MEXICO GEOGRAPHIC SUBCOMMITTEE)  
MINUTES

Monday, March 17, 2003

Point Clear, Alabama

Chairman Page Campbell called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. The following members and others were present:

Members

Joe O'Hop, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX  
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Joe Shepard, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Kevin Anson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Tom Van Devender, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Steven Atran, GMFMC, Tampa, FL

Staff

David Donaldson, FIN Data Program Manager  
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant  
Larry B. Simpson, Executive Director  
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director  
Gregg Bray, RecFIN(SE) Programmer/Analyst  
Donna Bellais, ComFIN Survey Coordinator

Others

Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Jeff Jenner, NOAA/NCDDC, Stennis Space Center, MS  
Rick Leard, GMFMC, Tampa, FL  
Linda Lombardi-Carlson, NMFS, Panama City, FL  
Peter Hoar, NOAA/NCDDC, Stennis Space Center, MS  
Jill Jensen, GRN, New Orleans, LA  
Sallie Davis, GRN, New Orleans, LA  
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was approved as written.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes for the meeting held on October 14, 2002 in Duck Key, Florida were approved as written.

Presentation of Mississippi Night Fishing Survey Results

G. Bray stated that very little is known about night fishing activities in the Gulf of

Mexico. The MRFSS survey collects primarily daytime dockside information and the assumption has been that catch information would be similar for night fishing but there is no data to prove this. Beginning in 2001 the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (MDMR) began doing night interviews in order to address this topic. One of the goals of this survey were to determine if catch and harvest rates were similar between day and night fishing, and also to produce expanded estimates of catch and harvest using night survey data. From June to October 2000 the MDMR nightly sent samplers to shore sites to obtain pressure estimates. Approximately 12 sites were added that did not have day fishing activity but were used frequently at night. The GSMFC provided the MDMR with monthly sampling schedules. The MDMR used MRFSS sampling forms. Two samplers were sent out for each assignment for safety reasons. For 2001, G. Bray reported that the night survey observed 31 species and the day survey observed 15 species while in 2002, night survey observed 22 species and the day survey observed 29 species. The species selected for day and night fishing comparison were sheepshead, spotted seatrout, sand seatrout, southern kingfish, black drum, red drum, and southern flounder since most of these were important management species in Mississippi. G. Bray presented the day and night catch rates for the various species and the effects these rates had on total catch. Some of the conclusions reached were that more species were observed during night sampling; some differences in catch rates were observed between day and night fishing; overall differences in expanded estimates were not significant from a management standpoint; and research does not dismiss the importance of night fishing with respect for MRFSS estimates. D. Donaldson noted that G. Bray will be giving this presentation as well as a report to the FIN Committee in June.

Discussion of Head Boat Sampling in the Gulf of Mexico D. Donaldson reported that there had been a conference call scheduled for the end of February to discuss this issue; however, due to conflicts, the call had to be rescheduled for after this meeting. Therefore, there is not much information to discuss at this time. Once the call has been completed, the issues discussed will be presented to the FIN Committee in June. D. Donaldson outlines the approach for sampling head boats in the Gulf of Mexico. Beginning in wave 3, the states will be contacting head boat operators, using the VDTS methodology, to compile effort data for head boats. This information will be compared with the log book data and from that, the most appropriate method for collecting data will be determined by FIN. In addition, Florida will attempt to conduct some at-sea sampling to collect catch data for head boats. Due to lack of funding, the other states will not be doing any at-sea sampling. J. Shepard asked why we would use a different method (at-sea sampling) for collecting catch data for head boats versus charter or guide boats. In order to accomplish this, a list of head boats (and thus a definition) needs to be developed. J. Shepard believed one method should be used for all for-hire boats, regardless of what they are called. D. Donaldson pointed out that at-sea sampling was being proposed because of the large number of passengers on head boats and the difficulty is collecting a representative sample of the catch, both retained and discarded. After some discussion, it was noted that these issues would be talked about during the scheduled conference call and should be discussed at that time.

#### Discussion of Trip Ticket Reporting Issues Regarding Out-of-State Dealers

C. Denson stated that there are several out-of-state dealers from Mississippi, Florida and Louisiana who conduct business in Alabama. In addition, there are fishermen who catch fish in Alabama waters but land the fish in another state. It was asked where should these dealers who

receive fish report the data to – Alabama or the other state. There is a concern that these fish may get double counted if they are reported to both states. The purpose of this discussion is to provide a clear process to fishermen/dealers on who and where they should report their catches. The group discussed several scenarios where out-of-state dealers catch fish in one state and land them in another state. It was pointed out that if a dealer lands fish in one state, they need to be a licensed dealer in that state to legally land those fish. However, C. Denson noted that in Alabama, if the fish are not purchased but just get off loaded from the vessel, the fisherman or dealer do not legally have to report that catch under Alabama law. After some discussion, the group decided that staff will develop a white paper outlining the issue. It was pointed out that this issue has several parts: 1) law enforcement; 2) legislative changes and 3) all five Gulf States having operating trip ticket programs. Staff will develop the document and distribute it to the Subcommittee. Then, the issue will be presented to the GSMFC Law Enforcement Committee as well as the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee at the October 2003 GSMFC meeting.

#### Status of Registration Tracking Module

D. Donaldson stated that this issue has been discussed several times by this group as well as FIN. The minimum data elements have been developed for this module and a matrix was put together which outlined what each agency currently collects regarding the minimum data elements. There are some gaps in the minimum data elements and D. Donaldson stated that he wanted this group to discuss strategies for collecting all the needed elements by each agency. J. Shepard asked about the need for date of birth. D. Donaldson noted that that particular data element is the basis for creating the unique identifier for fishermen and dealers. The Hull Identification Number (HIN) is the unique identifier for the vessel. Without the date of birth, the whole system that was developed by the Registration Tracking Work Group and approved by the FIN Committee, will not function properly. There was some concern among the states about the possibility of collecting date of birth. Since this issue will be discussed at the upcoming FIN Committee meeting, the group agreed that each agency needs to talk with the appropriate personnel about the feasibility of collecting date of birth through their licensing program. This information will help facilitate the discussion scheduled for the FIN meeting. To assist in these discussions, staff will distribute the registration tracking matrix to the various agencies prior to the FIN meeting.

#### Status of Biological Sampling Activities

**D. Donaldson** distributed a summary of otolith collections for the recreational and commercial fisheries in 2002. The summary presents the number of otoliths that have been collected as well as the targets, by species, mode, and state. D. Donaldson noted that overall, the collection of otoliths and reaching the targets were fairly successful. Since this was the first year of collection, he believed the states did a good job of reaching the targets and as the process gets more routine; there should be some improvement. It was noted that this was the first attempt at developing targets and some of the targets may not be reasonable. The work group needed to start somewhere and realized that there may need to be some adjustments made to the targets in subsequent years. For the first attempt, it was fairly successful. **D. Donaldson** stated that the states need to make sure they provide the tally information or actual collection data to the GSMFC on the established deadlines. This will allow staff to provide the states with feedback about the collection efforts and make modifications in efforts, as needed. He also mentioned that

the states need to provide the collection and analysis data to the GSMFC as soon as possible. Although the biological module is not completely finished, staff will be putting these data into the FIN DMS so users may access it.

**D. Donaldson** discussed that there is a possible disconnect between the collection and processing of otoliths. The way the biological sampling process was designed was to collect and process otoliths for all of the FIN priority species (about 28 species). However, due to funding constraints, sampling is only occurring on five species. This causes a problem because the five species FIN is focusing on may or may not be species that have stock assessments scheduled in the next year. Therefore, it might be more useful to shelve the otoliths for species that are not scheduled for stock assessments and focus on processing otolith for species (not necessarily being funded by FIN) that are scheduled for stock assessment in the next several years. **R. Lukens** noted that by following this process, it potentially puts the states and the GSMFC in conflict with the FIN cooperative agreement since they will not be meeting their obligations (processing otoliths for the five species) outlined in the cooperative agreement. **L. Lombardi-Carlson** stated that by processing otoliths and then storing them until they are needed could potentially cause problems such as having to reread them when they're needed. This was the case with the recent yellowtail snapper assessment where several sets of the otoliths analyzed by one group had to be reread because the methods for analysis had changed. **D. Donaldson** pointed out that there is a process under FIN, namely the otolith processors training workshops, which would prevent these types of things from occurring. These meetings get all personnel involved in processing otoliths together to compare reading techniques and discuss issues and problems regarding to analysis of otoliths and other biological information. **G. Davenport** stated that, in this day and age of limited funding, the state and federal agencies need to utilize their funds to get the most out of available resources. Using these FIN funds to process the otoliths for species that will undergo stock assessments in the near future is the best use of those funds. **J. Shepard** pointed out that FIN has developed a process for biological sampling as they have for recreational and commercial catch and effort, bycatch, detailed effort, etc. **J. Shepard** believed that FIN should stick with the designed plan and stay with the overall strategy. If FIN starts looking at short-term fixes, there is the potential to create some of the same problems that precipitated the design of FIN. In the long run, this system will work and time should be given to let it work. After a lengthy discussion, the group believed that this issue would not be resolved at this meeting and it needs to be further discussed by Data Collection Plan Work Group and the FIN Committee at their upcoming meetings. There are definitely two trains of thought on this issue and they both need to be further explored.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:10 p.m.

ARTIFICIAL REEF WORK GROUP  
Meeting Summary  
August 27, 2002

Attachment C

The conference call was called to order at 9:00 a.m. The following people were present:

Tom Sminkey, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD  
Kevin Anson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Steve Heath, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
David Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Gregg Bray, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ron Lukens, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Introduction

D. Donaldson stated that at the recent FIN meeting, the FIN Committee discussed a recommendation from the TCC Artificial Reef Subcommittee to add a question to the intercept and RDD surveys regarding use of artificial reefs while fishing. The FIN Committee recommended that the question be asked on the intercept survey only and begin in 2003. They also recommended that the question be asked every five years, based on need. The Committee also charged this Work Group with working out the details of the question and logistics of adding the question to the survey.

Wording of Question

The group then discussed the actual wording of the question. After some discussion, the group agreed that the question should be worded as follows:

Did you spend the majority of your fishing trip today fishing with 200 feet of:

- Standing oil or gas structure
- Submerged artificial reef
- Neither

Time Frame for Adding Question

The group discussed when to begin collecting the data on artificial reef use. It was pointed out the FIN recommended beginning in 2003. The group decided to target January 2003 as the starting point for data collection. T. Sminkey noted that that was contingent upon a modification to the data entry program. In order to modify the data entry program, it needs to be decided where the question should be placed on the form. After some discussion, the group decided to put the artificial reef question after the distance from shore question. G. Bray stated that he would modify the survey form and provide the question location and wording to T. Sminkey by the end of the week.

Next Step

D. Donaldson stated that the recommendations from this group would be presented to FIN Gulf of Mexico Geographic Subcommittee in October for their consideration.

Being no further business, the call was adjourned at 9:35 a.m.

FINAL WORDING OF QUESTION

**13b. Did you spend the majority of your fishing trip today fishing within 200 feet of:**

1	a standing oil & gas structure	8	Neither/Not applicable (shore mode)
2	a submerged artificial reef	9	Refused



# PRELIMINARY RESULTS

## Artificial Reef Summary Data

----- WAVE OF DATA=1 -----

Controlling for MODE\_FX=Charter

RIG(FISH NEAR REEF)	ST(STATE OF INTERCEPT)					
Frequency						
Percent						
Row Pct						
Col Pct	AL	WFL	LA	MS	EFL	Total
OIL&GAS (STAND)	2	1	4	0	1	8
	0.10	0.05	0.20	0.00	0.05	0.40
	25.00	12.50	50.00	0.00	12.50	
	6.06	0.08	3.13	0.00	0.19	
ART REEF (SUBM)	12	189	0	11	13	225
	0.60	9.45	0.00	0.55	0.65	11.26
	5.33	84.00	0.00	4.89	5.78	
	36.36	14.59	0.00	100.00	2.44	
NEITHER	19	1105	124	0	518	1766
	0.95	55.28	6.20	0.00	25.91	88.34
	1.08	62.57	7.02	0.00	29.33	
	57.58	85.33	96.88	0.00	97.37	
REFUSED	0	0	0	0	0	0
	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
	.	.	.	.	.	
	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Total	33	1295	128	11	532	1999
	1.65	64.78	6.40	0.55	26.61	100.00

# Artificial Reef Summary Data

----- WAVE OF DATA=1 -----

Controlling for MODE\_FX=Private

RIG(FISH NEAR REEF)

ST(STATE OF INTERCEPT)

Frequency Percent Row Pct Col Pct	AL	WFL	LA	MS	EFL	Total
OIL&GAS (STAND)	21 0.50 45.65 25.30	0 0.00 0.00 0.00	23 0.54 50.00 6.10	2 0.05 4.35 2.04	0 0.00 0.00 0.00	46 1.08
ART REEF (SUBM)	6 0.14 2.74 7.23	84 1.98 38.36 5.15	18 0.42 8.22 4.77	28 0.66 12.79 28.57	83 1.96 37.90 4.05	219 5.17
NEITHER	56 1.32 1.41 67.47	1544 36.42 38.89 94.67	336 7.92 8.46 89.12	66 1.56 1.66 67.35	1968 46.42 49.57 95.95	3970 93.63
REFUSED	0 0.00 0.00 0.00	3 0.07 60.00 0.18	0 0.00 0.00 0.00	2 0.05 40.00 2.04	0 0.00 0.00 0.00	5 0.12
Total	83 1.96	1631 38.47	377 8.89	98 2.31	2051 48.37	4240 100.00

# Artificial Reef Summary Data

----- WAVE OF DATA=2 -----

Controlling for MODE\_FX=Charter

RIG(FISH NEAR REEF)

ST(STATE OF INTERCEPT)

Frequency Percent Row Pct Col Pct	AL	WFL	LA	MS	EFL	Total
OIL&GAS (STAND)	1	9	29	0	2	41
	0.03	0.29	0.94	0.00	0.06	1.32
	2.44	21.95	70.73	0.00	4.88	
	0.76	0.41	23.58	0.00	0.35	
ART REEF (SUBM)	90	542	0	63	51	746
	2.91	17.51	0.00	2.04	1.65	24.10
	12.06	72.65	0.00	8.45	6.84	
	68.18	24.60	0.00	100.00	8.89	
NEITHER	41	1651	94	0	521	2307
	1.32	53.34	3.04	0.00	16.83	74.54
	1.78	71.56	4.07	0.00	22.58	
	31.06	74.94	76.42	0.00	90.77	
REFUSED	0	1	0	0	0	1
	0.00	0.03	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.03
	0.00	100.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	
	0.00	0.05	0.00	0.00	0.00	
Total	132	2203	123	63	574	3095
	4.26	71.18	3.97	2.04	18.55	100.00

# Artificial Reef Summary Data

----- WAVE OF DATA=2 -----

Controlling for MODE\_FX=Private

RIG(FISH NEAR REEF)

ST(STATE OF INTERCEPT)

Frequency Percent Row Pct Col Pct	AL	WFL	LA	MS	EFL	Total
OIL&GAS (STAND)	41	2	54	4	1	102
	0.75	0.04	0.98	0.07	0.02	1.86
	40.20	1.96	52.94	3.92	0.98	
	24.70	0.08	9.09	3.03	0.05	
ART REEF (SUBM)	46	160	15	63	112	396
	0.84	2.91	0.27	1.15	2.04	7.21
	11.62	40.40	3.79	15.91	28.28	
	27.71	6.23	2.53	47.73	5.52	
NEITHER	79	2407	525	65	1915	4991
	1.44	43.83	9.56	1.18	34.87	90.88
	1.58	48.23	10.52	1.30	38.37	
	47.59	93.66	88.38	49.24	94.33	
REFUSED	0	1	0	0	2	3
	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.04	0.05
	0.00	33.33	0.00	0.00	66.67	
	0.00	0.04	0.00	0.00	0.10	
Total	166	2570	594	132	2030	5492
	3.02	46.80	10.82	2.40	36.96	100.00

The call was convened at 9:00 a.m. The following people were present:

Geoff White, ASMFC, Washington, DC  
Bob Dixon, NMFS, Beaufort, NC  
Tom Sminkey, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD  
Tom Schmidt, NPS, Homestead, FL  
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Roger Uwate, USVIDFW, St. Thomas, USVI  
David Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

#### Purpose of the Meeting

D. Donaldson stated that the main topics of discussion were examining the feasibility of registering all fishing tournaments (not just the ones that target highly migratory species), using hydrologic unit codes (HUCs) instead of the existing FIN water body codes, and sampling strategies for private access sites.

#### Fishing Tournament Sampling

D. Donaldson stated that this group had been charged with the development of a sampling program for fishing tournaments. Information was distributed to the group regarding various fishing tournaments conducted in the states. At the last FIN meeting, it was suggested that this group explore the possibility of registering all tournaments conducted within the states. Currently, the NMFS is responsible for registering all highly migratory species (HMS) fishing tournaments. However, there are a wide variety of tournaments that target non-HMS species that are not registered. If all tournaments (those targeting HMS and non-HMS species) can be registered, it will provide a complete universe of fishing tournaments in the Gulf of Mexico. Once the universe has been developed, a sampling regimen can be developed to survey the selected tournaments. It was suggested that before moving forward with registering tournaments, a sampling design should be developed. It was pointed out that a basic design have been developed by NMFS, under the HMS tournament registration process, however, the status of that program is currently in limbo. The group asked staff to contact HMS personnel and find out the types of information that are or will be collected through this program. Staff will compile information about the HMS tournament sampling program and provide that data to the FIN Committee as part of the Biological/Environmental Work Group report. It was noted that FIN should work in conjunction with NMFS to ensure that the two sampling programs are compatible instead of developing separate programs. After some discussion, **the group recommended that the states begin exploring the possibility of registering all tournaments (excluding ones that are required to register under HMS rules) within their jurisdiction.** Once all tournaments are registered, a sub-sample can be selected and needed data will be collected from the various tournaments. The sample will have to be stratified by a variety of variables and the specific design (data elements, protocols, etc.) still need to be developed. The U.S. Virgin Islands have been sampling tournaments for a number of years and could be an important resource in the providing data collection design. In order for the tournament registration activity to be successful, the state directors will have to provide feedback regarding

the feasibility of this endeavor. It will be important for FIN Committee members to involve the state directors to ensure success of this activity.

#### Discussion of HUCs versus Existing FIN Water Body Codes

D. Donaldson stated that FIN charged this group with exploring utilizing hydrologic unit codes (HUCs) instead of the existing FIN sub area water body codes. The reason for using these codes is to make FIN more compatible with the ongoing invasive species activities in the Gulf of Mexico. FIN has been asked to participate in the collection of non-indigenous species during routine its data collection activities. In order to make the FIN data set and the non-indigenous species data set more compatible, it was suggested that FIN adopt the HUCs for their inshore codes. In term, the non-indigenous program would adopt the FIN offshore codes and thus the two data sets would be comparable. In order to uses the HUCs, the FIN sub area code would have to be expanded from 4 digits to 8 digits. The group discussed the pros and cons of changing the water body codes at this stage of the game. It was noted that if a change is made, it not only affects the FIN but it also has an impact on the ACCSP since the two data management systems (DMS) need to be compatible for inclusion into the national Fisheries Information System (FIS). Also, changing the DMSs would require a complete reload of all existing commercial data in both FIN and ACCSP and would require a large amount of programming and staff time to accomplish. In addition to the DMS changes, there would be educational costs associated with the change to inform and teach commercial fishermen about the new area codes as well as editing time to correct errors in the data. It was suggested that although the HUCs and existing sub area codes do not map exactly to one another, linkages could be made between the two coding system to allow compatibility and comparability among data bases. Therefore, **after some discussion, the group did not believe there was a compelling reason to change the coding system and recommended that FIN stay with the existing sub area codes.**

#### Discussion of Private Access Site Sampling Strategies

D. Donaldson stated that the group has been tasked to examine the issue of private access site sampling strategies. As with night fishing, tournament sampling, bycatch, etc., the first step is to quantify the magnitude of the activity. It is assumed that there is a large amount of fishing occurring from private access sites, however, it has never be quantified. The group discussed various ways to accomplish this task and believed the best method would be to add one or two questions to the Random Digit Dialing Telephone Survey (RDD) regarding use of private access sites. It was believed that there is flexibility in the NMFS telephone contract to add several questions (at no cost) to the RDD. T. Sminkey stated that he would verify this fact and provide the information to staff. Assuming this can be done, **the group recommended that several questions be added to the RDD concerning use of private access sites for fishing. Either this group or a subgroup will work with NMFS and the telephone contractor to develop the wording for the questions, determine the recall period, determine start and end times and other pertinent details for this activity.**

**Being no further business, the call was adjourned at 10:30 a.m.**

ComFIN Data Collection Work Group  
Meeting Summary  
September 17-18, 2002

Attachment E

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. and the following people were present:

Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Kevin Anson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Jason Vasques, VIDFW, St. Thomas, USVI  
Geoff White, ASMFC, Washington, DC  
Dee Lupton, NCDMF, Morehead City, NC  
Craig Lilyestrom, PRDENR, San Juan, PR  
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Purpose of the Meeting

D. Donaldson stated that there were two main issues the group needed to discuss. The first issue was the development of the bycatch module for FIN. The group has discuss this issue in the past and needs to further develop this module since bycatch is becoming more and more of an issue in fisheries management. The other issue was to review Puerto Rico's commercial data collection activities as they relate to the FIN standards.

Development of the FIN Bycatch Module

D. Donaldson stated that the group has discussed this issue in the past and developed some general guidelines for this module. FIN has not really focused on this issue since the emphasis has been on designing and implementing commercial and recreational catch and effort programs. However, since more emphasis is being placed on bycatch, FIN needs to begin the development of this module. It was noted that the Gulf Restoration Network (GRN) sent a letter that asked FIN to address the issue of bycatch and the collection of these data. The Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) has addressed this topic and developed an extensive data collection program. The FIN needs to develop a similar program to ensure that the two cooperative activities are compatible and comparable. Since the ACCSP has already devoted a large amount of time towards developing a bycatch module, the group believed that FIN should utilize all of their effort. It was decided that FIN should use the ACCSP bycatch module as a template for the development of the FIN module.

G. Davenport pointed out that the reef fish logbook program operated out of the NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center has recently begun compiling bycatch information regarding commercial activities in that fishery. K. Anson noted that the Trip Interview Program (TIP) has a bycatch component and Alabama is currently collecting these data. G. Davenport stated that these data are not routinely collected by the other states but it could be possible to begin collecting them in the future. D. Donaldson noted that the Gulf of Mexico port samplers are scheduled to meet in November and this issue could be added to the agenda. After some discussion, **the group recommended that the issue of beginning the collection of bycatch data via TIP be added to the Gulf of Mexico Port Samplers meeting, scheduled for November 2002.** The data collected via the logbooks and TIP (if approved) could provide some basic baseline and trends information regarding bycatch. These data are important because they provide a way of quantifying the magnitude of bycatch within various fisheries. These data

collection programs can be used to help identify "problem" fisheries and prioritize the fisheries that need to be further examined (via an at-sea observer program). It was suggested that the bycatch data elements from the logbook and TIP be compared with the minimum data elements for the at-sea observer program. This will allow the group to ensure that a base level of data is collected to assist in the identification and prioritization of the various fisheries.

After some discussion, the Work Group developed two recommendations. **The first recommendation is to adopt the ACCSP at-sea observer program data elements (quantitative) as the FIN standard and work on interim solutions with TIP and logbook data (qualitative) collection to advance data quality until a full at-sea observer program is possible. The other recommendation is to utilize the TIP bycatch component to identify/prioritize fisheries for at-sea observer sampling.** D. Donaldson stated that he would modify the ACCSP information to reflect the discussions of the group. A brief overview of the program and the list of the minimum data elements are in Attachment A.

#### Review of Puerto Rico's Commercial Data Collection Activities

D. Donaldson stated that at the last FIN meeting, Puerto Rico asked FIN to provide some feedback regarding their commercial data collection activities. C. Lilyestrom provided an overview of Puerto Rico's commercial programs. Puerto Rico has had the same fishing regulations in place since 1938. However, in 1998, Puerto Rico passed legislation that provided comprehensive regulations covering both commercial and recreational fishing in the Commonwealth. The regulations defined the various types of commercial fishermen (full-time, part-time, beginner, etc.) as well as making it mandatory that fishermen report their catches to the Puerto Rico Department of Environmental and Natural Resources (PRDENR). In order to implement these rules, PRDENR conducted outreach meetings with fishermen and dealers to get feedback from the industry. One of the biggest complaints from fishermen was that the commercial data was not believable. Although the legislation was passed, PRDNER has not been able to implement the regulations.

In order to provide justification for the need of these regulations, Puerto Rico is using the commercial and recreational data to bolster their arguments. In 2000, the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) was reinitiated in Puerto Rico. The data is critical to the management of the marine resources in Puerto Rico. It provided a fairly complete picture of the recreational activity and the data was readily available and accessible. On the other hand, there is very little effort data for the commercial activities and the data is somewhat difficult to access. To strengthen their justification, Puerto Rico want to improve their commercial program and asked the FIN to provide a review of their commercial programs. The group began reviewing Puerto Rico's programs and comparing them with the FIN standards. There were several issues including verification of fishermen's data, reporting data on a trip level, providing better access to the data and a variety of other issues. After some discussion, the group decided to consider these various issues and develop recommendations concerning the commercial data programs of Puerto Rico.

**Recessed at 2:00 p.m.**

**September 18, 2002**

**Reconvened at 8:30 a.m.**

#### Review of Puerto Rico's Commercial Data Collection Activities (cont'd)

The group continued to discuss Puerto Rico's commercial data collection programs. After some



discussion, the group developed the following recommendations:

- **Implement a system that tracks the activities of fishermen to determine if fishermen are reporting their data in a timely manner. This will allow PRDENR personnel to identify non-reporting fishermen and contact them to obtain their data. In addition, there should be some type of outreach with fishermen to provide guidance in the proper way to complete the data forms. A copy of the regulations should be provided as well to outline the requirements for reporting. And annual summaries of landings should be provided to fishermen as a way of providing feedback to fishermen.**
- **Require all fishermen to report their data on a trip level. Forms can be developed that allow for multiple trips to be reported on one form, but data for each trip needs to be provided on that form.**
- **Expedite the implementation of the data confidentiality memorandum of agreement (MOA) between Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, NMFS, and GSMFC. The implementation of this MOA will allow these agencies to share the data collected in the Caribbean.**

A secondary recommendation was to begin collecting all of the FIN minimum data elements for commercial catch and effort that are currently not being obtained. They included vessel ID, landing condition, and market grade and count (if applicable). The next step in this process is put these recommendations in front of the FIN Committee. Since FIN will not be meeting again until June 2003, the group believed the best way to proceed was to get input from FIN via an e-mail ballot. D. Donaldson stated that he would develop a list of recommendations and provide them to the FIN Committee for their consideration and approval.

The rest of the morning was spent visiting local fishermen to observe the fishing practices of the area. While on site, the group observed several vessels been off loaded and Puerto Rico Department of Environmental and Natural Resources personnel sampling the catches. This activity was very beneficial to the group by allow everyone to observe how commercial fishing operates in the islands.

**Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m.**

## **FIN Bycatch Monitoring Program**

The FIN bycatch monitoring program will be a coast-wide program (Texas through Florida, Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands) to include all living marine resources in estuarine, inshore, and offshore waters. Data should be collected from all U.S. fishing vessels leaving from and landing at Gulf and Caribbean ports, including shore-based fishing operations. The program should be conducted throughout the year and will include commercial, recreational, and the for-hire fisheries.

The bycatch program will include quantitative and qualitative data collection components. The quantitative component includes an at-sea observer program for selected commercial and for-hire fisheries as well as the existing data on the number of released and discarded finfish species through existing recreational intercept surveys. The qualitative bycatch program will include utilizing existing commercial, recreational and for-hire intercept programs to provide trend information as well as identify fisheries that need more in-depth study

Release/discard data collected through the qualitative release/discard monitoring program will be used to identify and prioritize fisheries requiring collection of additional bycatch data through quantitative methods.

FIN Data Collection Plan Work Group  
Meeting Summary  
June 3, 2003

Attachment F

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. The following people were present:

Bob Muller, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Mike Murphy, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Behzad Mahmoudi, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Joe O'Hop, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Britt Bumgardner, TPWD, Palacios, TX  
Jim Duffy, ADCNR, Dauphin Island, AL  
Joey Shepard, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
James "Tut" Warren, GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL  
John Poffenberger, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Steve Turner, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Gary Fitzhugh, NMFS, Panama City, FL  
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ron Lukens, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Review of 2002 and 2003 Otolith and Length Data Collection and Processing Activities

D. Donaldson noted that the group needed to review the status of the data collection process for biological data. J. Poffenberger stated that the group needed to review the targets in terms of representative sampling. The purpose of establishing the targets was to ensure that the species were representatively sampled throughout the region. The group needed to look at the total number of otoliths collected versus the landings of that species and compare the percentage of each (otoliths vs. landings). Theoretically, the percentage (by state) of otoliths collected vs. the percentage (by state) landed for a species should be fairly close. The group discussed how to ensure that representative sampling is occurring and it was noted that that is the responsibility of the sampling supervisor and in part the reason for having the tracking mechanism in place. G. Fitzhugh stated that there really was not a need to provide monthly reports of otoliths collected. Samplers could provide this information on a yearly basis since it is difficult to keep track of all the samples being collected by the various agencies. R. Lukens disagreed and stated that there needs to be monthly reporting to ensure that an agency does not over (or under) sample a particular species. By having monthly reporting, it will ensure that agencies adhere to the established targets and thus ensure representative sampling. There appeared to be some confusion about entire design of the program so J. Shepard provided a brief overview of the Fisheries Information Network (FIN). He stated that on the commercial side, the trip ticket system is the backbone of the program. Under the trip ticket system, there are various modules for collecting the needed data. One of the modules is the biological sampling module. The trip ticket system identifies the universe, which then allows for sampling to occur and ensure that the collected data are representative of the various fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico. After some discussion, the group decided to compare the percentage of otoliths collected vs. the percentage of landings for each of the five priority species. After setting up a spreadsheet, the group determined that collection of otoliths for greater amberjack and red snapper was representative (by state) of the commercial landing. However, it was pointed out that for red snapper, the

number of otoliths in Texas was a little low. For gulf flounder, the sampling did not appear to be representative of the landings. For southern flounder, Florida and Alabama do not appear to be collecting enough otoliths and thus the sampling is not representative for those states. For king mackerel, the group determined that the landings data appear to be erroneous and could not evaluate the sampling distribution. After some discussion, D. Donaldson stated that he would examine the data and determine what errors were made and then redistribute the data set. The revised dataset should examine the data (by state), by commercial vs. recreational and landings vs. otoliths collected (with targets).

#### Recommendations for Necessary Lengths and Otoliths for FIN Priority Species

The group then discussed the collection of necessary data. It was pointed out that the purpose of this activity was to improve stock assessments for the various species in the Gulf. There were two lines of thought discussed by the group. The first was to increase sampling of more species instead of focusing on only five species. Since funding for this activity has not increased, efforts should be placed to increase the number of species that are sampled and thus increase the amount of biological data available for stock assessments. The counter argument to that point is to focus on the five priority species (which were selected by FIN) and sample them in a representative manner. Then, when a stock assessment is needed for these species, there is a very robust dataset available, which in turn translates to a more reliable stock assessment. The group discussed this issue for quite some time. It was suggested that the targets (by state) remain constant but there could be some modification within the cells for each species. This might free up some funds to do additional species. It was also suggested to reduce the maximum number of otoliths per cell from 1,000 to 500. And, the desire was expressed that further consideration of the sampling design (number of significant strata, number of samples per strata), would take place for red snapper during the upcoming 2004 assessment and review. The increased age structure sampling of red snapper that occurred during the last few years should facilitate this examination. This approach might then be extended to other species. It was also pointed out that 200-500 samples per significant strata would be adequate. However, after all the discussion, **the group recommended that the biological sampling targets (established in the 2002 Data Collection Plan) should be used as the targets for the 2004 biological sampling activities.**

#### Development of 2004 FIN Data Collection Plan Document

D. Donaldson distributed the 2003 document for the group to review. It was pointed out that there were some sections of the document that could be strengthened by adding more detail. It was suggested that including the average weights used to convert pounds to numbers of fish for the commercial landings could be included, what years were used in establishing the targets, as well as other details. D. Donaldson stated that he would update the document with these additions and distribute it to the group for review. Once the document was reviewed and approved, FIN staff will print and distribute it to the appropriate FIN committees, subcommittees, work groups and other interested parties.

#### Other Business

The group discussed some of the processing issues associated with the collection of these data. The capacity of each of the facilities was addressed and it was noted that it is very important to disassociate the collection and processing components of this activity. It was also stated that there are some efficiencies to be achieved by pooling the various agencies' talents and expertise for processing the large variety of species sampled. It was suggested that several work

groups could be established to focus on specific species. This would allow a small group of individuals to develop expertise for this particular species and thus reduce the amount of reading errors and ensure comparability and compatibility among the various readers. It was agreed that this was a good idea and the group needs to further explore this concept.

**There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:15 p.m.**

The meeting was called to order at 9:10 a.m. and the following people were present:

Bob Dixon, NMFS, Beaufort, NC  
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Brady Trahan, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Matt Hill, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Kevin Anson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Joe O'Hop, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Beverly Sauls, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Richard Cody, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Tom Sminkey, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD  
Wade Van Buskirk, PSMFC, Gladstone, OR  
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

#### Purpose of the Meeting

D. Donaldson stated that the FIN Committee has charged this group with determining the best method for sampling head boats in the Gulf of Mexico and presenting the Committee with their recommendations.

#### Review of ACCSP For-Hire Pilot Survey Results

The group reviewed the ACCSP for-hire review report and findings documents. Since the group has seen these document before, there was not much time spend reviewing the reports. The group was aware of the findings and believed it was a better use of their time to determine the best method for sampling head boats in the Gulf of Mexico.

#### Discussion of Best Methodology for Sampling Head Boats in the Gulf of Mexico

D. Donaldson stated that the charge to the group was to recommend to the FIN Committee which method is best for collecting data from the head boat fleet in the Gulf of Mexico. M. Kasprzak stated that based on the ACCSP review findings, it appears that the Vessel Directory Telephone Survey (VDTS) methodology would work for sampling head boats in the Gulf. J. O'Hop noted that it might not be necessary to make a decision at this point in time. Both programs (VDTS and logbooks) could be run concurrently and after a designated period of time, the best method could be selected. In order to conduct the VDTS methodology, the group needed to discuss the various tasks for collecting the effort as well as the catch data. There will be two separate directories – one for charter boats and one for head boats during the benchmarking portion of the surveys. This will allow the head boat data collected from the VDTS and the data collected via the logbook program to be compared and assist in the evaluation of the different methods.

To collect the effort data, the current VDTS methodology will be used. The group discussed the percentage of head boats that need to be sampled on a weekly basis. For the ACCSP study, a 15% sampling rate was utilized, however, in some of the Gulf States, there are only a small number of head boats and a 15% rate may not adequately represent the fleet, especially if one or two vessels cannot be contacted. After some discussion, it was decided that

the best way to determine the appropriate sampling rate is to examine the existing head boat data. **J. O'Hop offered to look at the head boat data to determine the sampling rate of head boats. He will provide FIN staff with his analysis by January 13, 2003.** J. O'Hop noted that the ACCSP would be conducting some benchmarking activities for the VDTS and Logbook program in 2003. In the South Atlantic, the majority of head boats are on the east coast of Florida. However, because the FIN has taken the lead on recreational sampling, there are no dedicated funds to conduct the VDTS for head boat on the east coast of Florida. J. O'Hop stated that his staff could make the necessary telephone calls and some at-sea sampling with existing funds. In order to this, Florida needs to update the vessel directory to ensure that all the head boats have been entered and all the essential information has been updated. In addition, the program to create the sample draws for head boats needs to be provided to the FIN staff. **T. Sminkey stated that he could provide the program that was used in the ACCSP pilot survey to the FIN staff.** The group then discussed the possibility of all the Gulf States conducting the VDTS for head boats in 2003. **After some discussion, the group believed it would be possible to make the telephone calls to the selected head boats operators in the Gulf of Mexico in 2003.** To facilitate this task, the states need to make sure the head boat information in the vessel directory has been updated. **B. Dixon will provide the most current information regarding the head boats that participate in the logbook program to the FIN staff. And R. Cody will provide B. Dixon a list of the vessel directory data elements (critical elements only) as well as a description of each of the elements.** A tentatively starting date of wave 3 (May 2003) was agreed upon by the group, but is subject to change.

The group then discussed the catch portion of this task. There are two ways to collect catch information from head boats – dockside sampling and at-sea sampling. **After some discussion, the group decided that catch data should be collected via at-sea sampling.** W. Van Buskirk noted that the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission has developed protocols as well as a training manual for at-sea sampling on the West Coast. This information is available on their web site and the group believed this information would be useful in developing the protocols for the Gulf of Mexico. The group discussed several topics related to at-sea sampling. The issue of sampler liability was discussed and states noted that the samplers would be covered by their workmen's comp so this is not an issue. Another issue was the vessel operators' willingness to allow samplers on the vessels. Most of the stated believed operators would allow samplers on their vessels although M. Kasprzak was concerned about the cooperation from Louisiana operators. As a preliminary step, it was discussed that samplers, during their routine sampling activities, should talk with head boat operators about their willingness to cooperative with at-sea sampling. The group then discussed the sample size for at-sea sampling. Again the group believed the best way to determine the number of boat trips that need to be sampled would be to examine the head boat data. The number of samples needed would be based on the percentage of trips, by state. **D. Donaldson stated that the FIN staff would take the lead on determining the number of boat trips that need to be sampled, by state. The analysis would be ready by January 13, 2003.**

#### Next Steps in Process

The group decided there should be a conference call (late January-early February 2003) to discuss the various aspects of the VDTS and at-sea sampling tasks for head boat sampling in the Gulf of Mexico. The group will look at a variety of issues including the sampling rate analysis to determine the appropriate telephone sampling rate; starting date for VDTS sampling, examining the at-sea sampling protocols for the Pacific States, determining the number of boat trips that need to be sampled by the at-sea methods, by state, and other pertinent issues.

**Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m.**



### ABSTRACT

The Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery is one of the most important fisheries in the U.S., harvesting in 2000 257 million pounds of shrimp valued at \$582 million, thus comprising 16% of total U.S. commercial fishery value. However, since 1986, fishery landings have fallen 15%. Increasingly, there are concerns that the decline in landings and the variability of those landings may be linked to hypoxia, which results from nutrient overloading and is characterized by oxygen-depleted waters incapable of sustaining marine life. Since the mid 1980s, hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico has grown from a few isolated patches to a Gulf-wide hypoxic zone spanning an area the size of New Jersey during summer months. It is the second largest hypoxic area in the world, more than twice as large as any other hypoxic area in U.S. waters.

Despite the magnitude of the hypoxic zone in the Gulf, previous research has not been able to identify a link between hypoxia and the shrimp fleet. The inability to identify this link may be due to the countervailing effects hypoxia has on shrimp. The most overt negative effect hypoxia has on the fishery is that it kills shrimp thereby reducing the stock available for harvest. In addition, hypoxia may increase travel costs if vessels displaced from hypoxic fishing sites must travel to more distant fishing grounds. In turn, as fishing effort is displaced from once-fertile fishing grounds to other fishing grounds, congestion may increase at the remaining healthy sites thereby reducing average vessel returns at these sites. Finally, fishermen may be adversely affected by hypoxia if it is indeed found to impinge upon the growth of juvenile shrimp, resulting in a smaller-sized, less valuable product.

Offsetting these potentially negative effects is that hypoxia results in shrimp aggregating along the edge of a hypoxic area, which reduces search time and at-sea production expenses. This may suggest that hypoxia could provide at least some short-term benefits to shrimpers. However, maintaining this hypothesis, it then follows that a hypoxic zone, which reduces the amount of "edge" available for aggregating shrimp relative to say a patchy hypoxic environment, would likely exceed any hypothetically optimal level of hypoxia.

The objective of this project is to analyze the link between the Gulf of Mexico hypoxia and the shrimp fleet using a spatially explicit behavioral model that distinguishes between hypoxic and non-hypoxic fishing grounds. However, to estimate this model requires integrating cost and earnings data with fishing effort data. While fishing effort and earnings data may be obtained from the state trip ticket programs, cost data was last collected for the Gulf shrimp fishery in 1992. In 2003, NOAA Fisheries will implement a cost-earnings survey of the offshore fleet and GulfFIN will implement a similar survey for the inshore fleets in Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. There is, however, no plan to conduct a comparable survey of the inshore fleets in Louisiana and Texas. Given the potential spillover effects across segments of the fishery as fishing effort is displaced from hypoxic areas to healthy fishing sites, it is important to cover all segments of this fishery. Further, since the inshore fleets of Louisiana and Texas may be directly affected by hypoxia, e.g., Barataria Bay has one of the highest occurrences of hypoxia in the Gulf, it is crucial that these fleets and fishing grounds be included in the analysis.

Thus, the first phase of this project will be to collect cost data for the inshore fleets of Louisiana and Texas. This information will be combined with existing data to determine the welfare effects of hypoxia on the shrimp fishery. Simulations will then be conducted to determine the welfare effects associated with changes in the spatial distribution of the hypoxic zone.

## STATUS OF 2003 ACTIVITIES

### A. Data Collection and Management Activities

Task A1:      Development and Implementation of Trip Ticket Program (Goal 2, Objective 2)  
(C)

Objective:      Develop and implement a trip ticket program for the Southeast Region.

Status            Mississippi is currently implementing a trip ticket program in their state. Unfortunately, Mississippi was still unable to get legislation passed that would make it easier to collect data from dealers, but is continuing to implement a program for oyster, bait shrimp and finfish. Full operation of Louisiana and Alabama trip ticket programs continue. GSMFC enter into a contract with Southwest Computer Bureau (SCBI) to provide installation and maintenance of electronic trip ticket programs for Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida. Texas is still evaluating the feasibility of implementing trip ticket program in their state.

Task A2:      Collection of Recreational Fisheries Data (Goal 2, Objective 5) (R)

Objective:      Collection of recreational fisheries data in the Gulf of Mexico.

Status:            Activities are operating normally. The states are collecting the necessary data and meeting or exceeding quota on a routine basis. The GSMFC continues to administer and coordinate these activities.

Task A3:      Implementation of Methods to Monitor the For-Hire Fisheries (Goal 2, Objective 5) (R)

Objective:      Identify, evaluate, and test methodologies to survey charter and head boat fisheries.

Status:            The Charter Boat Telephone Survey was initiated in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and the east and west coasts of Florida in January 2000. Texas is currently conducting the survey and will continue until July 2003. Once data collection stops, Texas, GSMFC, and NMFS will evaluate the various methods and determine the best method to use for the Texas for-hire fishery. The FIN Committee will be discussing the appropriate data collection method for head boats in June 2003.

Task A4:      Continue the Support of Menhaden Data Collection Activities (Goal 2, Objective 5) (C)

Objective:      Continue the support of menhaden sampling in the Gulf of Mexico.

Status:            Menhaden port samplers were hired to continue collecting data regarding the menhaden fishery. The activity is operating normally. This task began in January 2000.

Task A5: Continue the Collection of Head Boat Data (Goal 2, Objective 5) (R)

Objective: Continue the support of head boat sampling in the Gulf of Mexico.

Status: Port samplers were hired to continue collecting data regarding the head boat fishery in the Gulf of Mexico. The activity is operating normally. This task began in January 2000.

Task A6: Collection of Biological (otoliths and lengths) Data (Goal 2, Objective 5) (F)

Objective: Implement the collection of recreational and commercial sampling of biological data in the Gulf of Mexico.

Status: Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida have hired personnel to conduct biological sampling interviews of recreational and commercial fishermen using the modified MRFSS and Trip Interview Program protocols. Samplers collect length frequencies, identifications of species, trip and gear characteristics, hard parts (otoliths) and make comparisons of interview data to trip ticket data for quality assurance purposes. Samplers are focusing on red snapper, king mackerel, gulf and southern flounder and greater amberjack. The states are also analyzing the otoliths to determine year class.

Task A7: Design, Implementation and Maintenance of Data Management System (Goal 3, Objective 3) (F)

Objective: To design, implement, and maintain a marine commercial and recreational fisheries data management system to accommodate fishery management/research and other needs (e.g., trade and tourism).

Approach: The FIN will continue to develop the Data Management System (DMS). Development of the registration tracking system will be address by the FIN Data Base Manager. This module will be used by both FIN and ACCSP. With the deployment of the Data Base Manager, new activities have been delayed and work will focus on maintaining existing loads.

Task A8: Standards/Protocols/Documentation for Data Management (Goal 3, Objective 4) (F)

Objective: Develop standard protocols and documentation for data formats, input, editing, quality control, storage, access, transfer, dissemination, and application.

Approach: Standard protocols and documentation for data formats, input, editing, quality control, storage, access, transfer, dissemination, and application are being developed for the system.

**B. Committee Activities**

Task B1: Development of a Program Design Document (Goal 1, Objective 1) (F)

Objective: Develop a program design document for FIN

Approach: The Committee reviewed the document in 2002. Periodic reviews will be

conducted, as necessary.

Task B2: Annual Operations Plan, 2004 (Goal 1, Objective 3) (F)

Objective: Develop 2004 Annual Operations Plan including identification of available resources that implements the Framework Plan.

Status: Through meetings and mail, the Committee will develop and complete an Annual Operations Plan for 2004. This document will be reviewed and approved at the 2003 meeting.

Task B3: Development of Funding Initiatives to Establish Marine Recreational Fisheries (MRF) Surveys (Goal 1, Objective 3) (R)

Objective: Support the establishment of long-term, comprehensive MRF surveys in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

Approach: Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, NMFS and GSMFC personnel are exploring ways to ensure long-term collection of recreational data in the Caribbean.

Task B4: Information Dissemination (Goal 1, Objective 4) (F)

Objective: Distribute program information to cooperators and interested parties.

Approach: This task is an ongoing activity.

Task B5: Implementation of Outreach Program (Goal 1, Objective 4) (F)

Objective: Further development and implementation an outreach program for FIN

Approach: The FIN Committee approved the outreach strategy in June 2002. As outlined in the document, it is incumbent on the program partners to conduct outreach within their jurisdiction. The FIN staff will attend a variety of meetings to promote the program as well. FIN Committee will continue to work with the ACCSP in developing outreach activities.

Task B6: Development of the Discards, Releases, and Protected Species Interactions Modules (Goal 2, Objective 2) (C)

Objective: Develop the discards, releases, and protected species interactions modules of the FIN.

Approach: In 2002, information regarding absence/presence and magnitude of discards activities was compiled for the Southeast Region. Using this information and that developed by the ACCSP, the Work Group developed a draft data collection module for the compilation of bycatch for all commercial fisheries in the Southeast Region. This draft module will be presented to the FIN Committee for their consideration at the 2003 meeting.

Task B7: Development of the Social/Economic Module (Goal 2, Objective 2) (F)

Objective: Develop the social/economic module for the ComFIN.  
Approach: The Social/Economic Work Group developed a pilot study in the Gulf of Mexico and their recommendations will be presented to the FIN Committee at the 2003 meeting.

Task B8: Development of Metadata Database (Goal 2 , Objective 2) (F)

Objective: Compile metadata for inclusion into a metadata database for the Southeast Region.  
Approach: The data base structure has been developed and entry of data into the FIN DMS was scheduled for 2003. Since the Data Base Manager was been called up by Army, this task has been delayed.

Task B9: Development of Registration Tracking System (Goal 2, Objective 2) (C)

Objective: Development of a registration tracking system for FIN.  
Approach: A registration tracking system was approved by the Committee in June 2002. The next step is for program partners to modify their existing licensing systems to collect all the needed elements. This issue will be discussed by the FIN Committee at the 2003 meeting.

Task B10: Commercial Quality Assurance and Quality Control (Goal 2, Objective 3) (C)

Objective: Identify and determine standards for commercial catch/effort data collection, including statistical, training, and quality assurance and quality control standards.  
Approach: The FIN has developed draft documents that describe the various techniques and methods for collection of marine commercial data and this document needs to be reviewed and approved by the Committee.

Task B11: Port Samplers Workshops (Goal 2, Objective 3) (C)

Objective: Convene workshops of state and federal port samplers to discuss commercial data collection activities  
Approach: In an effort to provide a forum for discussing various issues concerning commercial data collection activities, the FIN Committee decided to convene workshops of state and federal port agents. There will be several workshops: Texas/Louisiana/Mississippi/Alabama/ Florida; and the Caribbean. These workshops will be attended by the state and federal port agents from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Puerto Rico, and U.S. Virgin Islands, the FIN chairman, appropriate NMFS staff and other interested personnel. The recommendations developed from the 2002 meetings will be addressed by the FIN Committee at the 2003 meeting.

Task B12: Identification and Evaluation of Current Programs (Goal 2, Objective 4) (F)

Objective: Identify and evaluate the adequacy of current and future programs for meeting FIN standards.

Approach: This task is an ongoing activity.

Task B13: Combining Duplicative Data Collection and Management Activities (Goal 2, Objective 4) (F)

Objective: Identify and combine duplicative data collection and management efforts.

Approach: This task is an ongoing activity.

Task B14: Determination of Methods for Collecting Recreational Data from Private Access Sites Goal 2, Objective 5) (R)

Objective: Determine most appropriate methods for collecting recreational data from private access sites.

Approach: The FIN Committee will charge the Biological/Environmental Work Group with determining the best method of collected data from private access sites. This issue has been raised in the past but no plan has been developed to address it. The first step is to determine the magnitude of the activity. The Biological/Environmental Work Group will present the FIN Committee their recommendations regarding this issue at the 2003 meeting.

Task B15: Determination of Catch Rates and Species Composition from Night Fishing Goal 2, Objective 5) (R)

Objective: Determine catch rates and species composition from night fishing.

Approach: In 2001-2002, a night fishing pilot study was conducted in Mississippi. A presentation and report will be giving to the FIN Committee at the 2003 meeting for their consideration.

Task B16: Collection of Tournaments Data (Goal 2, Objective 5) (R)

Objective: Collect appropriate information from fishing tournaments, and integrate with other marine recreational fisheries data.

Approach: A list that identifies all ongoing tournaments in the Southeast Region has been compiled and reviewed by the Committee. The Biological/Environmental Work Group will present their recommendations regarding this issue at the 2003 meeting.

Task B17: Integration into the Stock Assessment Process (Goal 2, Objective 5) (F)

Objective: Develop a plan that outlines the needs for stock assessment for the upcoming year as well as tracking the collection of these data.

Approach: The Committee has developed a data collection plan that identifies the priority species (and associated data needed to be collected) for the state, interstate and federal entities as well as establishes sampling target levels for biological data. The Data Collection Plan Work Group met prior to the FIN meeting and will present their recommendations for 2004 targets at the 2003 meeting.

Task B18: Establish/modify recreational licenses (Goal 2, Objective 5) (F)

Objective: Establish/modify recreational licenses to meet criteria for use as sampling frame  
Approach: The FIN has discussed this issue in the past and the states need to make the necessary modifications to their licenses. The Committee will periodically review the status of each states' licenses.

Task B19: Coordination and Integration of Data Collection Efforts (Goal 2, Objective 5) (F)

Objective: Encourage coordination, integration, and augmentation, as appropriate, of data collection efforts to meet the FIN requirements.  
Approach: This task is an ongoing activity.

Task B20: Evaluation of Innovative Data Collection Technologies (Goal 2, Obj 6) (F)

Objective: To evaluate and recommend innovative data collection technologies  
Status: Issues will be address by the Committee as the need arises. The GSMFC and Mississippi are currently evaluating the latest version of data loggers for collection of recreational data and results will be presented to the FIN Committee.

Task B21: Evaluation of Information Management Technologies (Goal 3, Objective 6) (F)

Objective: To evaluate and recommend innovative, cost-effective information management technologies.  
Approach: This issue will be addressed by the Committee as the need arises. This task is an ongoing activity.

Task B22: Long-term National Program Planning (Goal 4, Objective 1) (F)

Objective: Provide for long-term national program planning  
Approach: The FIN Committee members, GSMFC staff and ASMFC staff continue to attend Pacific RecFIN, PacFIN, ACCSP Operations Committee, and other pertinent meetings and coordinate activities as appropriate. This task is an ongoing activity.

Task B23: Coordination, Consistency and Comparability with Other Cooperative Marine Commercial and Recreational Fisheries Programs (Goal 4, Objective 2 and Objective 3) (F)

Objective: Coordinate FIN with other regional cooperative marine commercial and recreational fisheries programs and encourage consistency and comparability among regional programs over time.  
Approach: The FIN Committee members, GSMFC staff and ASMFC staff continue to coordinate activities with the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, Pacific RecFIN, and PacFIN on the West Coast. This is an ongoing activity.

# **FIN For-Hire Work Group Report**

June 2003



FIN For-Hire Work Group  
Meeting Summary  
June 6, 2003

The meeting was called to order at 1:05 p.m. and the following people were present:

Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Joey Shepard, LDWF Baton Rouge, LA  
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Kevin Anson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Joe O'Hop, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Beverly Sauls, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Steve Brown, Amy Spencer, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Amy Spencer, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Craig LaVine, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Jon Wolfson, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Bob Dixon, NMFS, Beaufort, NC  
Tom Sminkey, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD  
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Review of Vessel Directory Telephone Survey (VDTS) Methods

D. Donaldson reviewed the procedures for the Vessel Directory Telephone Survey (VDTS). At the last meeting, the group decided that the states would begin making the telephone calls to the selected head boats operators in the Gulf of Mexico in 2003. The group then discussed the sampling rate. It was initially suggested that a 15% rate would adequate sampling the head boat fleet. This was the rate that was used in the South Carolina pilot survey. However, B. Dixon noted that the 15% rate was not sufficient for the South Carolina study and suggested that an increase in the sampling rate was needed. After some discussion, **the group decided that the head boats would be sampled at a 25% rate and data collection will begin in wave 4 (July 2003).** T. Sminkey proposed "fishing methods" be taken off the questionnaire and be replaced by "target species". The reason is that it appears that no one is using the data from "methods" question. In addition, this modification is being done on the Atlantic coast in order to make the telephone survey more compatible with the Large Pelagic Survey (LPS). There were concerns about the utility of the "fishing methods" question. After some discussion, **it was suggested that NMFS poll the stock assessment personnel regarding the utility of "methods" question and make sure that by removing it, it does not jeopardy any assessments.** The group discussed the review of the data. D. Donaldson pointed out that the charter boat data is reviewed in conjunction with the wave meetings and since the majority of people involved in the head boat project are already attending the wave meetings, it would make sense to the review the head boat data on the same schedule. B. Dixon noted that there might be a lag with the logbook data since some of the captains do not always return the logbooks on a timely manner. Although there may be a lag, it will not prevent the group from reviewing the data although it might not be the most recent data. **The group decided to review the head boat data in**

**conjunction with the wave meetings.** The group then discussed the upcoming charter boat moratorium. The rule, which establishes the moratorium, states that charter and head boat operators must participate in a variety of surveys in order to maintain their reef fish permit. Both the VDTS and the NMFS logbook program are included in the required surveys. The question was raised about which survey captains need to participate in order to keep their permits. After some discussion, **the group agreed that captains must participate in the NMFS logbook program since that is still the official method for collecting data from head boats.** The last issue the group addressed pertained to the development of a brochure that outlines the program and asks for support from the industry. It was pointed out the Atlantic Coastal Cooperative Statistics Program (ACCSP) developed a brochure for the pilot study that was conducted in South Carolina. It was suggested that this brochure could be used as a template for the Gulf document and T. Sminkey stated that he would have Nicole DeJeet send the ACCSP brochure to FIN staff.

#### Discussion of Sampling Methodology for Field Activities

D. Donaldson stated that the charge to the group was to recommend to the FIN Committee which method is best for collecting data from the head boat fleet in the Gulf of Mexico. It was stated that field activities on the Atlantic coast would initially be 50% at-sea sampling and 50% dockside sampling. B. Dixon noted that the group might not need to make a decision regarding the best method for collecting catch data on head boats at this point. It might be beneficial to learn from the experiences of ACCSP before making a decision. It was mentioned that FIN has delayed making a decision on this issue for quite some time (awaiting results from the ACCSP pilot survey) and the FIN Committee has made it clear that a decision regarding the preferred method in the Gulf of Mexico need to be made in the near future. The group discussed some of the concerns about conducting dockside sampling. There is the potential for head boat and MRFSS samplers to be at the same site to conduct interviews. The group stated that there needs to be coordination between the samplers to ensure head boat patrons are not inundated by samplers. If a head boat and MRFSS sampler show up at the same site, the head boat sampler would take precedence over the MRFSS sampler. Another issue discussed was related to industry's willingness to participate. There is concern that head boat operators will not be willing to participate in both the NMFS logbook program and the VDTS. The group discussed conducting outreach meeting however, D. Donaldson noted that there were no funds available in 2004 for outreach meetings. It was pointed out that information about the telephone survey is in the current for-hire newsletter and a directed mailing explaining the purpose of the survey and asking for support scheduled for the near future. It was also mentioned that the development of a brochure could help distribute information about the survey. T. Sminkey stated that catch/effort and bycatch are two distinct components and this group needs to focus on the catch/effort activities. J. Shepard noted that catch/effort and bycatch issues need to be kept separate and FIN needs to develop specific modules for each component. B. Dixon mentioned the need for benchmarking of the two surveys. Dedicated funding needs to be secured so both methods can be effectively tested before activities begin. He was concerned that the work will be done in a patchwork fashion since adequate funding is not currently available. B. Dixon also stated that the goal for head boat monitoring should be 100% at-sea sampling. The group then discussed some of the details about at-sea sampling. It is difficult to follow and keep track of anglers throughout the entire fishing trip. To assist in this problem, it would be useful to have two samplers on board the vessel (although that increases the cost). One sampler could observe fish being discards while the

other sampler could be getting measurements from the fish. And samplers should only focus on getting measurements for managed species. After some discussion, **the group recommended that for head boat sampling in the Gulf of Mexico, effort data be collected via the Vessel Directory Telephone Survey; catch data be collected via dockside interviews if limited funds were available; if additional funds were available, catch data could be collected via 50% dockside and 50% at-sea sampling; and bycatch data be collected via at-sea sampling as well as some catch data (for QA/QC purposes).** In addition, FIN will monitor the results of the ACCSP implementation of head boat sampling on the Atlantic coast and make the necessary modifications depending on the results of the implementation. The group then discussed the coordination of state and federal port samplers. Since there is a possibility the both state and federal port agents could attempt to sample the same head boat, it is critical that they coordinate their scheduled and talk to one another on a routine basis. The last issue the group addressed related to the development of a head boat vessel directory and the development of interview targets for head boats. **It was decided that NMFS and GSMFC staff develop sample sizes by wave/by vessel for the head boats operating in the Gulf of Mexico.**

J. O'Hop stated that Florida would be conducting phone calls to head boat operators in 2003 (along with the other Gulf states) as well as conducting ad hoc at-sea sampling. The purpose of conducting the at-sea sampling is to test the methodology for collecting bycatch (and related catch data) to ensure the methods operate smoothly and efficiently.

**Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:45 p.m.**

**STRIPED BASS TECHNICAL TASK FORCE  
MINUTES**

**June 10-12, 2003**

**Biloxi, Mississippi**

Chairman Doug Frugé called the meeting to order Tuesday, June 10, 2003, at 1:12 p.m. in the Hawk's Nest Room of the Isle of Capri Hotel. Attendance was as follows:

Members Attending

Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Doug Frugé, USFWS FCO, Ocean Springs, MS  
Howard Rogillio, LDWF, Lacombe, LA  
Rick Long, FWC, Midway, FL (*proxy for Charles Mesing*)  
James M. Barkuloo, USFWS Ret., Panama City, FL  
Pete Cooper, Jr., Saltwater Sportsman, Buras, LA  
Rob Weller, GDNR, Albany, GA  
Isaac Wirgin, NYU School of Medicine, Tuxedo, NY

Members Absent

John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL  
Larry Nicholson, USM/CMS/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
J.T. Jenkins, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL

Staff

Steve VanderKooy, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Cindy Yocom, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

D. Frugé requested that S. VanderKooy provide a status report to the group as agenda item 4. The revised agenda was adopted by consensus.

Approval of Minutes

**M. Bailey moved to adopt the minutes from the meeting held January 29-31, 2003, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, as written. P. Cooper seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved.**

Status Report

S. VanderKooy noted that he had sent an E-mail to the group which basically stated that a new revision would be sent after this meeting for further review and comment. That revision will contain all progress since the copy sent out after the January meeting. Since January, D. Frugé has provided the bulk of Section 3 (biology). The Habitat Section is complete. This section was distributed to the TCC Habitat Subcommittee for their review. There were some concerns regarding the fact that

Louisiana was not broken out by individual bays like the Texas portion; however, no one on the subcommittee provided any additional information or reports to add to the section. We may want to shorten the Texas portion or provide more detail on Louisiana estuaries. However, that may not be necessary for this species. R. Weller provided the Georgia portion of Section 5 on disk. Once complete, the section will be distributed to the Law Enforcement Committee for their review. VanderKooy reported that he has spent some time searching through Federal Aid reports and other literature to add to Section 7 (socio-economics) and will add angler surveys information to that section. Doug Frugé provided VanderKooy with a complete list of literature from his library that may have application to Section 7.

The main focus of this meeting will be to draft the recommendations section. A limited amount of time will be allowed to discuss the other sections; however, those discussions should be on content, not line-by-line edits. Any grammatical corrections and markups should be submitted to Cindy for incorporation outside this meeting.

#### General Comments & Edits

The document was reviewed and edited by section. All assignments are due mid-August. Noted were the following needs/assignments:

- D. Frugé add status of the stock by river in Section 3. Pull stocking history from Section 6 and move into Section 3.
- D. Frugé check with a taxonomist regarding the use of the word "race."
- J. Barkuloo add to 3.3.3.1.
- I. Wirgin write up hybrids for 4.5.8.
- S. VanderKooy add tables from Bateman & Brim to Section 4 (Tables 9 and 10).
- S. VanderKooy add methyl-mercury to 4.5.7.
- Make sure sand and gravel mining is included in Section 4.
- C. Yocom incorporate Georgia portion as provided by R. Weller.
- M. Bailey will provide a revised Section 6 by mid-August.
- S. VanderKooy send demographics out to assign counties to bay systems for inclusion in Section 7.

#### Group Effort to Draft Section 8 (Recommendations)

D. Frugé noted that at the Morone Workshop last year, an extensive discussion ensued on genetics management and maintaining genetic diversity in stocking programs. An argument ensued between several participants, one who proposed that a genetic management plan for striped bass should be written. Another participant argued that a genetic management plan would not be practical to implement. The question for this group is how should genetics management within the management plan be approached. After discussion, the group agreed that –

- I. Wirgin (with assistance of R. Long) will write up a discussion on genetics management for striped bass. The document will be included in its entirety as an appendix in the

FMP. An executive summary will be included in the management section. The work will be completed by mid-August.

D. Frugé distributed a proposed format for Section 8. After review, the group agreed that the format is much more efficient. The group began to draft a revised Section 8 which is appended to these minutes. Noted were the following needs/assignments:

- R. Long add mortality in Section 6 which needs to be added to Section 8.
- D. Frugé will add detail on stock enhancement methods to mesh with 8.3.3.3.
- D. Frugé will review the Sturgeon FMP for other recommendations that may pertain to striped bass.
- After discussion with R. Lukens, S. VanderKooy, D. Frugé will draft Program Coordination (re: entity to coordinate Anadromous activity).
- R. Long to send information on Indian middens to D. Frugé to be included as historic population levels.
- D. Frugé will complete Section 8 for inclusion in the next draft.

#### Other Business

P. Cooper suggested the group tour the Gulf Coast Research Laboratory. On Wednesday, June 11, the group recessed at 3:40 p.m. and traveled to Ocean Springs. Although L. Nicholson was not available, the Anadromous Section provided the group with a tour of their facilities. S. VanderKooy guided the group through several sections of the laboratory. James Warren demonstrated age and growth research using otoliths.

On Thursday, June 12, 2003, the group discussed the development of a striped bass web site. All were in favor of the GSMFC putting together an informational web site.

A discussion ensued during development of the management section on the future direction of the TCC Anadromous Subcommittee. S. VanderKooy explained that after development of the FMP, the subcommittee may be inactive until a specific issue arises for discussion or action. D. Frugé suggested that he, S. VanderKooy, and R. Lukens meet to discuss the future of the Anadromous Subcommittee.

The next meeting of the Striped Bass Technical Task Force was tentatively scheduled for November 2003 in Apalachicola, Florida.

**There being no further business, the meeting adjourned Thursday, June 12, 2003, at 12:45 p.m.**

## 8.0 Management Goals and Recommendations

The primary goal of this interstate FMP is to restore and maintain self-sustaining Gulf striped bass populations in suitable rivers within their native range. Further, a secondary goal is to establish and maintain riverine, recreational striped bass fisheries within that range.

These goals apply to the free-flowing portions of rivers below the Fall Line or farthest downstream obstruction, unless otherwise stated. The river systems to which these goals apply are the Mississippi, Tangipahoa, Tchefuncte, Pearl, Wolf, Biloxi, Pascagoula, Mobile-Alabama-Tombigbee, Perdido, Escambia, Blackwater, Yellow, Choctawhatchee, Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint (ACF), and the Ochlockonee. The specific goals for each of these rivers systems are detailed in Section \_\_\_\_.

The recommendations provided by the Striped Bass Technical Task Force are intended to have regional application and are proposed to the individual states for their adoption and implementation. However, states may elect to implement regulations which are more restrictive if situations within the fishery warrant such action. Regulations which are less restrictive than regional recommendations are discouraged, although the states at no time relinquish any of their rights or responsibilities to regulate their own fisheries. Since striped bass populations are affected by factors outside the jurisdiction of coastal fishery management agencies, many of the following recommendations are directed toward inland fishery agencies and states outside the GSMFC Compact.

## 8.1 Management Unit

The management unit under this interstate FMP is striped bass (*Morone saxatilis* Walbaum), which includes both Gulf and Atlantic races. Both currently exist within the native range of Gulf striped bass.

## 8.2 Management Area

The management area for this interstate FMP is the state jurisdictional waters (inland and coastal) of the Gulf of Mexico region within the historical native range of striped bass. This includes the states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. Because of the cooperative agreement among participatory states establishing the ACF Striped Bass Technical Committee, Georgia is also included in the management area. Striped bass fisheries exist within Texas reservoirs and their tailwaters because of reservoir stocking efforts. However, Texas is excluded from the management area because it is outside the accepted native range of Gulf striped bass.

## 8.3 General Management Recommendations

The recommendations included in this section are considered general and apply to the entire management area.

### 8.3.1 Sale and/or Purchase

It is recommended that the sale and/or purchase of striped bass harvested from public waters continue to be prohibited.

It is accepted that striped bass populations in the Gulf of Mexico region have been in severe decline for several decades, and stocking efforts by the states and federal agencies are primarily responsible for those that exist. The abundance of striped bass in Gulf of Mexico waters remains too low to support a viable commercial fishery, and commercial harvest of the species has not occurred since the 1960s. Current state laws for the Gulf of Mexico region prohibit the sale and/or purchase of striped bass harvested from public waters; therefore, it is counter productive to restoration goals to encourage development of a commercial fishery.

### 8.3.2 Bag Limits and Size Limits

Size and bag limits should be established for striped bass on all public waters within the management area. Those regulations should reflect the management goal for each river or river system. A maximum daily bag limit of six fish per person with a minimum size restriction of eighteen inches TL is recommended.

Striped bass can occur in large aggregations, particularly in the early year classes. This, coupled with the aggressive nature of the species, indicates a high probability that a six fish bag limit would be exceeded once an aggregation of fish was located by an angler. Anecdotal information indicates that individual daily catches of 20 fish are not unusual once an aggregation of fish is located, especially in the warmer months when they aggregate in known thermal refuges. This led the state of Georgia to close the recreational fishery in selected areas of the ACF from May through October.

Mortality - Rick Long to add to section 6 and refer to here after checking the literature.

Stress-related mortality increases with size (cite), and fish greater than 18 inches TL are less likely to survive catch-and-release practices. This size and bag limit recommendation is intended to serve as a general rule for the Gulf of Mexico region, but different more specific recommendations may be made for certain rivers. States are encouraged to enact regulations which are more restrictive as appropriate based on the specific needs of the fishery within their jurisdiction.

### 8.3.3 Stocking

The occurrence of striped bass in most areas of the Gulf of Mexico region is dependent upon stocking efforts. To support restoration activities, it is recommended that the states within the management area continue to stock striped bass fingerlings on an annual basis. Genetic diversity in the fish stocked should be maximized, and genetic integrity of the Gulf race should be maintained in appropriate rivers. Specific recommendations on the number, size, and race to



stock will be given by individual river systems. Stocking efforts should follow accepted protocols and standards as implemented by state fishery agencies and federal cooperators (find cite).

#### 8.3.3.1 Genetic Diversity

Ike - add following genetic plan

#### 8.3.3.2 Genetic Integrity

In systems where restoration of Gulf race populations is the goal, only offspring from broodfish of ACF ancestry should be stocked.

Even though Atlantic Coast fish have been stocked into the ACF and introgression has been observed, many studies have demonstrated that the striped bass population in the ACF is genetically distinct from all Atlantic Coast populations. A high percentage of individual fish from the ACF exhibit mitochondrial DNA and nuclear DNA genotypes not seen in populations along the Atlantic Coast or elsewhere on the Gulf Coast.

#### 8.3.3.3 Evaluation of Stocking Success

It is recommended that stocking success be evaluated on both the short-term and long-term. Short-term tests will evaluate mortality associated with transport and initial introduction into receiving waters. Long-term tests will evaluate growth and survival to age-1.

Short-term tests may include holding a subsample of fish in receiving waters, transport containers, or aquaria for at least 48 hours and seining from two days to a month after release. Long-term sampling may include seining, trawling, electrofishing, gill netting, hook-and-line, and visual assessment (scuba).

Because striped bass populations in the Gulf are heavily dependent on stock enhancement, it is necessary that stocking success be evaluated. This is essential for assuring maximum efficiency and for making the best use of financial resources which are available for restoration. Short-term evaluation helps avoid repeating previous unsuccessful stockings. Evaluation also allows for adjustments to subsequent stockings and predictions of recruitment and future year-class strength.

#### 8.3.4 Data Collection

It is recommended that fishery independent and dependent data be collected to evaluate the status of individual striped bass populations. Striped bass age structure, condition, size of stock, genetic composition, mortality rates, exploitation rates, maturity schedule, age-at-length, relative weights, and sex ratios in selected river and bay systems along the Gulf should be determined.

#### 8.3.4.1 Fishery Independent Data

Standardized fishery independent sampling programs for striped bass within the management area should be developed.

Standardized sampling programs will provide information on age structure, condition, size of stock, migration, interspecific competition, and genetic composition of striped bass stocks. Methodologies would include electroshocking, trawling, seining, gill netting, mark and recapture, and angling. Annual programs should minimally monitor YOY abundance and adult abundance and condition. Specific genetic markers should be determined in collected fish.

Data resulting from standardized fishery independent sampling will be summarized and statistically analyzed to provide fishery independent information annually. These data will identify both short and long-term trends in population dynamics within rivers and potentially between systems.

#### 8.3.4.2 Fishery Dependent Data

A standardized fishery dependent data sampling program for striped bass within the management area should be developed.

A standardized sampling program will provide information on  
Remember to add bycatch blurb

#### 8.3.5 Identification of Thermal Refuge Habitat

Identify and describe functional and potential thermal refuge habitats in selected rivers in the management area.

#### 8.3.6 Identification of Spawning Habitat

Identify and quantify current and potential spawning habitats in selected river basins in the management area.

#### 8.3.7 Identification of Nursery Habitat

Identify and quantify current and potential nursery habitats in selected river basins in the management area.

#### 8.3.8 Comprehensive Habitat Assessment

Develop comprehensive assessments in selected rivers that integrate information on important habitats and other environmental and anthropogenic factors that positively or negatively affect striped bass populations.

#### 8.3.9 Thermal Refuge Restoration

Design and implement projects to restore, enhance, and create thermal refuge habitat on selected rivers in the management area.

#### 8.3.10 Spawning Habitat Restoration

Design and implement projects to restore, enhance, and create spawning habitat on selected rivers in the management area.

#### 8.3.11 Nursery Habitat Restoration

Design and implement projects to restore, enhance, and create nursery habitat on selected rivers in the management area.

Address other environmental factors to be adapted from Gulf sturgeon fmp - Doug

#### 8.3.12 Information and Education Program

Develop and implement a coordinated information and education program for Gulf striped bass in cooperation with existing programs.

Web sites, brochures, outdoor media

#### 8.3.13 Program Coordination

SJV, DF, & RRL get together and discuss future of Anadromous Fish SC  
Specify what entity will coordinate the group regardless. FWC, GSMFC?  
DF will draft after discussions with RRL/SJV

#### 8.3.14 Taxonomic Investigations

Investigate the biological significance of the Gulf population from a taxonomic standpoint. How it relates to others. Separate population or subspecies?

#### 8.3.15 The Role of Contaminants in the Extirpation of the Species

Investigate the effects of river-borne contaminants on early life stage success of striped bass from selected rivers within the management area.

#### 8.3.16 Historic Population Levels

Investigate relative abundance of striped bass in the management area during pre-colonial times using archeological evidence.

Rick - send info to Doug

#### 8.4 River Specific Management Goals and Recommendations

##### 8.4.1 Lower Mississippi River

###### 8.4.1.1 Management Goal

Maintain an Atlantic race striped bass recreational fishery at an optimum yield level, based on available and enhanced habitat, that is supported by natural reproduction and escapement from upstream reservoirs.

###### 8.4.1.2 Specific Management Recommendations

8.4.1.2.1 Monitor abundance of adult and YOY striped bass.

8.4.1.2.2 Conduct creel surveys that include striped bass.

8.4.1.2.3 Develop and implement projects to enhance nursery and adult habitat.

8.4.1.2.4 Determine the extent of escapement from the river into the surrounding areas through freshwater diversion projects and natural passages.

##### 8.4.2 Tangipahoa River

###### 8.4.2.1 Management Goal

Maintain a Gulf race striped bass put-grow-take recreational fishery and develop a brood-stock source.

###### 8.4.2.2 Specific Management Recommendations

8.4.2.2.1 Stock at least 7,000 and up to 25,000 Phase II Gulf striped bass annually.  
(Pearl and connectivity of river into Lake Pontchartrain, broodstock)

8.4.2.2.2 Evaluate water quality and tissue burdens of contaminants in introduced striped bass populations.

##### 8.4.3 Tchefuncte River

###### 8.4.3.1 Management Goal

Maintain a Gulf race striped bass put-grow-take recreational fishery at levels consistent

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with stocking rates and maintenance of a broodstock source.

#### 8.4.3.2 Specific Management Recommendations

8.4.3.2.1 Stock at least 7,000 and up to 25,000 Phase II Gulf striped bass annually.  
(Pearl and connectivity of river into Lake Pontchartrain, broodstock)

8.4.3.2.2 Evaluate water quality and tissue burdens of contaminants in introduced striped bass populations.

#### 8.4.4 Pearl River

##### 8.4.4.1 Management Goal

Establish a self-sustaining population of Gulf race striped bass that can support a recreational fishery at an optimum yield level consistent with the carrying capacity of available, restored, and enhanced habitat, and develop a broodstock source in the Ross Barnett Reservoir, while maintaining a put-grow-take recreational fishery in the river.

##### 8.4.4.2 Specific Management Recommendations

8.4.4.2.1 Stock at least 14,000 and up to 50,000 Phase II genetically-diverse Gulf striped bass annually into the river.  
(Get L. Nicholson to comment)

8.4.4.2.2 Stock at least 100,000 and up to 300,000 Phase I or at least 20,000 to 60,000 Phase II genetically-diverse Gulf striped bass annually into the Ross Barnett Reservoir.

8.4.4.2.3 Fishery-independent and dependent data gathering to assess the population.

8.4.4.2.4 Remove or modify low-water sills near Bogalusa, Louisiana, to allow for fish passage.

8.4.4.2.5 Discourage future channel dredging downstream of Bogalusa, Louisiana.

8.4.4.2.6 Determine impacts of sand and gravel dredging operations on striped bass populations.

#### 8.4.5 Wolf and Biloxi Rivers

##### 8.4.5.1 Management Goal

For both rivers, maintain Atlantic or Gulf race striped bass put-grow-take recreational fisheries at levels consistent with stocking rates.

##### 8.4.5.2 Specific Management Recommendations

8.4.5.2.1 Stock at least 7,000 and up to 25,000 Phase II striped bass annually.  
(L. Nicholson - check these numbers)

#### 8.4.6 Pascagoula River

##### 8.4.6.1 Management Goal

Short-term: Maintain a Gulf race striped bass put-grow-take recreational fishery at an optimum yield level consistent with stocking rates, available, restored, and enhanced habitat, and restoration of a self-sustaining population.

Long-term: Maintain a self-sustaining population of Gulf race striped bass and a recreational fishery at optimal yield consistent with the carrying capacity of available, restored, and enhanced habitat.

##### 8.4.6.2 Specific Management Recommendations

#### 8.4.7 Mobile-Alabama-Tombigbee

##### 8.4.7.1 Management Goal

Mobile River and riverine portions of Alabama and Tombigbee rivers below the Fall Line

Maintain a mixed Gulf and Atlantic race recreational fishery at an optimum yield level, based on available, restored, and enhanced habitat, that is supported by natural reproduction and escapement from upstream waters and supplemental stocking of Gulf race striped bass.

Black Warrior River between Warrior Lock and Dam and the Fall Line

Short-term: 1) Maintain Gulf race striped bass put-grow-take recreational fisheries at optimum yield levels consistent with stocking rates, available, restored, and enhanced habitat, and restoration of self-sustaining populations and 2) maintain a Gulf race striped bass broodstock source in Lewis Smith Lake.

Long-term: 1) Maintain self-sustaining populations of Gulf race striped bass and recreational fisheries at optimal yield levels consistent with the carrying capacity of available, restored, and enhanced habitat and 2) maintain a Gulf race striped bass broodstock source in Lewis Smith Lake.

#### **Perdido River**

Maintain a Gulf race striped bass put-grow-take recreational fishery at a level consistent with stocking rates.

## **Escambia River**

Short-term: Maintain a Gulf race striped bass put-grow-take recreational fishery at an optimum yield level consistent with stocking rates, available, restored, and enhanced habitat, and restoration of a self-sustaining population.

Long-term: Maintain a self-sustaining population of Gulf race striped bass and a recreational fishery at optimal yield consistent with the carrying capacity of available, restored, and enhanced habitat.

## **Blackwater River**

Maintain a Gulf race striped bass put-grow-take recreational fishery at a level consistent with stocking rates.

## **Yellow River**

Maintain a Gulf race striped bass put-grow-take recreational fishery at a level consistent with stocking rates and maintenance of a broodstock source.

## **Choctawhatchee River**

Short-term: Maintain a Gulf race striped bass put-grow-take recreational fishery at an optimum yield level consistent with stocking rates, available, restored, and enhanced habitat, and restoration of a self-sustaining population.

Long-term: Maintain a self-sustaining population of Gulf race striped bass and a recreational fishery at optimal yield consistent with the carrying capacity of available, restored, and enhanced habitat.

## **Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Rivers System**

Short-term: Maintain Gulf race striped bass put-grow-take recreational fisheries at optimum yield levels consistent with stocking rates, available, restored, and enhanced habitat, maintenance of broodstock sources, and restoration of self-sustaining populations.

Long-term: Maintain self-sustaining populations of Gulf race striped bass and recreational fisheries at optimal yield levels consistent with the carrying capacity of available, restored, and enhanced habitat and maintaining broodstock sources.

## **Ochlockonee River**

1) Maintain a Gulf race striped bass put-grow-take recreational fishery at a level consistent with stocking rates and 2) maintain a Gulf race striped bass broodstock source in Lake

Talquin.

**Suwanee River**

There would be no goal specified for this river in the FMP.

June 12, 2003



APPROVED BY  370103  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**SHEEPSHEAD TECHNICAL TASK FORCE  
MINUTES  
July 22, 2003  
New Orleans, Louisiana**

The first meeting of the Sheepshead Technical Task Force (TTF) was called to order Tuesday, July 22, 2003, at 8:30 a.m. in the Holiday Inn Chateau Le Moyne Hotel, New Orleans, Louisiana. Attendance was as follows:

Members Attending

Chuck Adams, UF, Gainesville, FL  
Jason Adriance, LDWF, Grand Isle, LA  
Michael W. Brackin, Breakaway Fishing, Gulfport, MS  
Paul Cook, LDWF, New Iberia, LA  
John Mareska, AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL  
Jeff S. Mayne, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Erick Porche, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Andy Strelcheck, FWC, Tallahassee, FL  
Perry Trial, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX

Members Absent

Simon Zirlot, Coden, AL

Guests

Manuel Ruiz, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA

Staff

Steve VanderKooy, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Cindy Yocom, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

Steve VanderKooy opened the meeting and asked each participant to introduce themselves. The task force is made up of a scientific representative from each Gulf State (Adriance, Mareska, Porche Strelcheck, Trial); a recreational fishery representative (Brackin); a commercial fishery representative (Zirlot); an economist (Adams); a habitat representative (Cook); and a law enforcement representative (Mayne).

Adoption of Agenda

The agenda was reviewed and one addition item (travel policy overview) was added under item 3.

Interjurisdictional Program Overview and FMP Process

S. VanderKooy, Program Coordinator, presented an overview of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries (IJF) Program and Commission development process for FMPs. The IJF Program is authorized through the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act of 1986 (Public Law 99-659, Title III). The purpose of

the Act was to promote and encourage state activities in support of management of IJF resources identified in interstate FMPs. The Act also promotes and encourages management of IJF resources throughout their range.

Funding under the Act supports states' long-term monitoring and assessment programs and other research. The Act also provides funding for the three interstate marine commissions (Atlantic, Gulf, and Pacific) to develop and revise management plans used by the states to enact appropriate management strategies to maintain harvestable stocks of commercial and recreational fish.

The Commission patterns its plans to those of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC) to ensure compatibility in format and approach between regional and federal FMPs. Since the passage of the IJF Act in 1986, the Commission has produced nine FMPs, three revisions, and one amendment. Critical components of FMPs are determined by ten national standards:

- 1) Conservation and management measures shall prevent overfishing while achieving, on a continuing basis, the optimum yield from each fishery for the U.S. fishing industry;
- 2) Conservation and management measures shall be based on the best scientific information available;
- 3) To the extent practicable, an individual stock shall be managed as a unit throughout its range, and interrelated stocks of fish shall be managed as a unit or in close coordination;
- 4) Conservation and management measures shall not discriminate between residents of different states. If it becomes necessary to allocate or assign fishing privileges among various U.S. fishermen, such allocations shall be:
  - fair and equitable to all such fishermen;
  - reasonably calculated to promote conservation; and
  - carried out in such a manner that no particular individual, corporation, or other entity acquires an excessive share of such privileges.
- 5) Conservation and management measures shall, where practicable, consider efficiency in the utilization of the resources; except that no such measure shall have economic allocation as its sole purpose.
- 6) Conservation and management measures shall take into account and allow for variations among, and contingencies in, fisheries, fisheries resources, and catches.
- 7) Conservation and management measures shall, where practicable, minimize costs and avoid unnecessary duplication.
- 8) Conservation and management measures shall, where consistent with the conservation requirements of this Act (including the prevention of overfishing and rebuilding of overfished stocks), take into account the importance of fishery resources to fishing communities in order to:
  - provide for the sustained participation of such communities, and
  - to the extent practicable, minimize adverse economic impacts on such communities.
- 9) Conservation and management measures shall, to the extent practicable,
  - minimize bycatch and
  - to the extent bycatch cannot be avoided, minimize the mortality of such bycatch.
- 10) Conservation and management measures shall, to the extent practicable, promote the safety of human life at sea.

In order to alleviate confusion with the federal definition of essential fish habitat and its associated requirements, FMPs developed under the Commission program utilize the term "essential habitat."

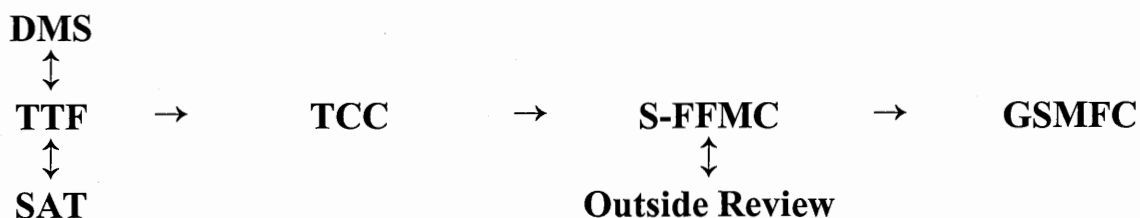
The development of FMPs begins with species prioritization. The State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee (S-FFMC) accomplishes this task and establishes a technical task force to review all technical material, draft a document incorporating current biological, sociological, economic, and fishery information. The TTF shall also provide management scenarios based on this information.

The TTF is composed of a core group of scientists from each Gulf state and is appointed by the respective state directors that serve on the S-FFMC. Also, a TTF member from each of the following GSMFC committees or subcommittees (Law Enforcement, Habitat, Commercial Fisheries Advisory, and Recreational Fisheries Advisory) is appointed by the respective committee. In addition, the TTF may include other experts in economics, socio-anthropology, population dynamics, and other specialty areas when needed. The TTF is responsible for development of the FMP and receives input in the form of data and other information from the DMS and the SAT.

Once the TTF completes the plan, it may be approved or modified by the Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) before being sent to the S-FFMC for review. The S-FFMC may also approve or modify the plan before releasing it for public review and comment. After public review and final approval by the S-FFMC, the plan is submitted to the GSMFC where it may be accepted or rejected. If rejected, the plan is returned to the S-FFMC for further review.

Once approved by the GSMFC, plans are submitted to the Gulf States for their consideration for adoption and implementation of management recommendations.

The review process is outlined below:



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DMS = Data Management Subcommittee

SAT = Stock Assessment Team

TTF = Technical Task Force

TCC = Technical Coordinating Committee

S-FFMC = State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee

GSMFC = Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission

Outside Review = standing committees, trade associations,  
general public

### GSMFC Travel Policy

C. Yocom provided the group with a brief overview of GSMFC travel policies. The authorization and reimbursement procedures were explained and the group was referred to the *GSMFC Travel Guidelines* for detailed information. Any questions regarding travel should be addressed to C. Yocom, the Commission's travel officer.

### FMP Table of Contents/Assignments

A boilerplate table of contents was reviewed and changed as appropriate. The revised copy with assignments is appended to the minutes as Attachment 1. Several items were noted by task force members:

- The Stock Assessment Team will convene to determine if a regional stock assessment can be done for this species.
- Chuck Adams will contact Mike Jepson, a sociologist, to see if he would be interested in participating in development of the FMP.
- Address mercury content and nutritional information for the species.
- Send Chuck Adams any economic impact assessments, civil restitution rates, and consumption studies on the species.
- Review state organizations for completeness.
- Add Illegal Harvesting and False Reporting under Management Considerations.

### Election of Chairman

**J. Mayne moved that the group elect a chairman at the beginning of the next meeting. The motion was seconded by Perry Trial and approved unanimously.**

### Next Meeting

S. VanderKooy asked the group to please let him know in advance if they cannot attend a scheduled meeting. The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for late September in New Orleans. All assignments should be submitted to the Commission office by September 12 so drafts can be assimilated and copied for review prior to the meeting.

**There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:51 p.m.**

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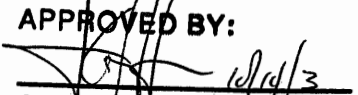
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10.1.4 Tracking Sheepshead Imports and Exports .....	
10.1.5 Monitoring of Guide Services .....	
10.2 Proactive Measures .....	
10.2.1 Fishing Year .....	
10.2.2 Limitations on Catch .....	
10.2.2.1 Size Restrictions .....	
10.2.2.2 Bag and Possession Limits .....	
10.2.2.3 Gear Restrictions .....	
10.2.2.4 Bycatch Reduction .....	
10.2.2.5 Area and Seasonal Closures .....	
10.2.3 Funds in Support of Management .....	
10.2.4 Habitat Loss, Degradation, and Alteration .....	
<b>11.0 Regional Research Priorities and Data Requirements .....</b>	<b>All</b>
11.1 Biological .....	
11.2 Environmental .....	
11.3 Industrial/Technological .....	
11.4 Economic and Social .....	
11.5 Resource Management .....	
<b>12.0 Review and Monitoring of the Plan .....</b>	<b>Staff</b>
12.1 Review .....	
12.2 Monitoring .....	
<b>13.0 References .....</b>	<b>All</b>
<b>14.0 Appendix .....</b>	
14.1 Glossary .....	<b>Staff</b>
14.2 Market Channel Survey .....	
14.3 Stock Assessment .....	

SEAMAP Subcommittee Meeting  
**MINUTES**  
Myrtle Beach, South Carolina  
August 6, 2003

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

### **Call to Order**

Chairman Jim Hanifen called the meeting to order at 8:35 a.m. The following members and others were present:

#### **Members:**

Jim Hanifen, Chair, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Richard Waller, USM/CMS/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
Paul Choucair, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Steve Heath, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Stu Kennedy, *proxy for Rick Leard*, GMFMC, Tampa, FL  
Mark Leiby, FWC/FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Terry Henwood, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS

#### **Staff:**

Scott Nichols, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Mark McDuff, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Karen Mitchell, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Cheryl Noble, Staff Assistant, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

### **Adoption of Agenda**

R. Waller stated he would distribute a hand-out and discuss the Spring Plankton Cruise under Other Business. With this addition, the agenda was adopted.

### **Approval of Minutes**

**M. Leiby moved to approve the March 18, 2003 minutes. P. Choucair seconded and it passed.**

### **Administrative Report**

J. Rester reported the SEAMAP Spring Plankton Survey took place from May 12 through May 31, 2003. One hundred seventeen stations were sampled from the west Florida shelf to the Louisiana/Texas border. This was the twenty-second year for the survey. He stated the SEAMAP Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey took place from June 2 through July 27, 2002. Weather and mechanical problems did affect the survey. This was the twenty-second year for this survey, also. Real-time shrimp data were produced and distributed for seven weeks this summer. He said he did not receive any comments, negative or positive, concerning the data this year. An end of the year

summary is currently being produced and will be distributed on the Commission web site only. J. Rester stated he will give a report on the Data Coordinating Work Group Meeting under Agenda Item 9.

### **Status of FY2004 Budget**

T. Henwood reported that it appears SEAMAP will be level funded again at \$1.4 million. He said this is the Senate mark only because the House mark is not in yet, but he believes they will also level fund SEAMAP.

### **Activities and Budget Needs for FY2004**

Florida - M. Leiby reported Florida should be able to continue SEAMAP activities this coming year with level funding of \$121,340.

Alabama - S. Heath said Alabama should be able to continue SEAMAP activities this coming year with level funding of \$68,000, but he would like to purchase electronic measuring boards if he receives the \$20,000. R. Waller said he has an extra electronic measuring board he can give to him on permanent loan.

Mississippi - R. Waller said Mississippi will also continue at level funding of \$118,495. He said he was approximately \$5,000.00 short to purchase the computer system for the TOMMY MUNRO but he received the funds from ship time because the vessel had mechanical problems and did not go on all the scheduled cruises.

Louisiana - J. Hanifen reported Louisiana will continue SEAMAP activities at level funding of \$135,200. He said that, due to increased operating costs and other funding restrictions, only federal SEAMAP funds are available for SEAMAP activities; current funding levels will not support three cruises and plankton identification.

Texas - P. Choucair said Texas will also continue at level funding at \$58,804 but they will probably drop the video trap survey. He would like to purchase a tablet PC if there is any extra money from the \$20,000.00 to enter the real time data.

GSMFC - J. Rester stated the GSMFC will continue at level funding which is \$90,564.

After discussion, the Subcommittee agreed that Alabama will get the \$20,000.00 to purchase the electronic measuring boards. If the complete \$20,000.00 is not used, J. Rester will coordinate a discussion on which state will receive the rest.

### **Coordinated Fishery Independent Data Collection**

D. Donaldson reported that at the last joint meeting it was decided to develop a white paper to address the south Atlantic's concerns about the initiative. He said this will be discussed at the joint meeting.

### **SEAMAP Data: EFH and Beyond**

J. Rester said this agenda item stems from several issues. He said one is the discussion from last year on different ways to market SEAMAP in order to receive more funding. SEAMAP has been in existence for over twenty years and the funding level is close to what it was at the beginning. The main emphasis for this is from his email concerning the GMFMC's EFH EIS. There was a paragraph in the section dealing with data sources (see handout) that were looked at but not used in the EIS and the justification for not using them and the justification for not using SEAMAP data starts off with "To use the SEAMAP data would require a substantial analytical effort to convert the survey results into interpolated distribution and/or density polygons in a GIS." He said as you read the hand out, it does not portray SEAMAP in the best light. He said he drafted new language to submit to the contractor. They did include it in the latest version, but he thinks that when they undertook the EIS they did not understand SEAMAP data and how they could use it. He said he does not think they realized they would receive the catch data and then they would have to make their own shapefiles, so they felt the data was not in GIS format but it actually is. He said that at the Data Coordinating Work Group meeting last week, they discussed possible things that can be done with the raw data. He said that a researcher from Texas Tech University used SEAMAP data in her paper "Locating Potential Sites for Marine Reserves and Softbottom Communities of the Gulf of Mexico (handout)." He pointed out the GIS maps in the paper that were produced from SEAMAP data.

P. Choucair demonstrated different ways SEAMAP data can be used to produce final products in GIS format. He showed how easy it was to make shapefiles and manipulate the data and showed examples of how the Subcommittee could make the data available. After discussion, the Subcommittee decided the contractor did not realize it would take time to use the data and probably underbid so they did not use the data. The Subcommittee felt that if P. Choucair can do this in a matter of four hours, then experts should not have had a problem using it. S. Kennedy stated that if these examples would have been available at the Council meetings, the SEAMAP data probably would have been used for the EIS. The Subcommittee decided they will have to have these examples in the future for the SEAMAP data to be used, and to help secure more funding. They discussed different protocols in standardizing the data and changing the atlas to a more user friendly version. After more discussion, it was suggested to start the Data Coordinating Work Group report to see what their suggestions were for the data and atlas before making any final decisions on changes and producing GIS products in the future.

### **Data Coordinating Work Group Meeting Review**

J. Rester reported the Data Coordinating Work Group met last week to discuss the data atlas, real time data, data collection sheets, and data collection protocols. Under the data atlas discussion, the

Work Group recommended that real time plots, the joint annual report, and the marine directory for 2001 be added to the upcoming 2001 atlas. The Work Group also recommended that the atlas include the raw data for 2001 with a disclaimer that it is only current up to the production date of the CD-ROM and that before using it for analytical purposes, users should check for updates. The Work Group also discussed several ways of modifying the current atlas layout. Specifically, the Work Group wanted to explore using other types of plots instead of 30 x 30' squares. The Work Group decided to develop new plots for 2001 for the Subcommittee to review at the March meeting. They suggest using the current format for this atlas and the new formats should be reviewed then implemented in the 2002 atlas. Additionally, the Work Group stated that some of the tables might not be useful if the raw data is located on the CD-ROM. This basically pertains to Table 2 which is the environmental table and it is about 25% of the atlas and would serve no purpose, except for visual reference, if the raw data is included on the CD-ROM. They also discussed ways to modify the maps in the second half of the atlas to make those "prettier", maybe with numbers or colors with densities, etc. They discussed several different ways and all suggestions will be presented at the March meeting, then the Subcommittee can decide how to do the 2002 atlas. He said they did not make a recommendation on what type of file the raw data should be in, ASCII or in a database structure. The Subcommittee decided to put it in ASCII format. J. Rester said the work group will have all recommendations at the March meeting for the Subcommittee to make the final decision.

The Subcommittee asked when the 2001 atlas will be ready and M. McDuff said it depends on David Hanisko's schedule. J. Hanifen asked if they could have a draft by the October meeting. The Subcommittee discussed the advantages of the new atlas format with the main one being extra funding may be secured with the new layout. Also, the atlas would be more usable and the users may help push to get more funding so the data will keep being available. J. Hanifen said there needs to be a way to get feedback from the users on the usefulness of the product and one way would be to provide links to the web page.

**After discussion, R. Waller moved to do the 2001 atlas in the same format as before but to add the marine directory, annual report, real time plots, and the data in ASCII delimited format. S. Heath seconded and it passed.**

**R. Waller moved to accept the Work Group's recommendation to change the format for future atlases. S. Heath seconded and it passed.** J. Hanifen asked the members to contact the GIS specialist in their office and ask them to give direction on how to develop a new GIS format for the Atlas. The members should then contact M. McDuff with the recommendations and then he will schedule a meeting. He also asked J. Rester to email the Subcommittee and remind them of this task.

J. Rester reported the Work Group then reviewed the SEAMAP real time data and discussed how it can be improved. In an effort to save money, the Work Group suggested generating an email distribution list for some of the real time recipients. Most recipients from universities and state and federal agencies should not need a hard copy, they can be sent an email with a link to the real time data. J. Rester suggested sending a questionnaire to the distribution list asking how they prefer receiving the data. He said most of the shrimpers may still want hard copies. The Work Group also discussed how the dominant species is determined. They wanted to clarify if numbers or weight



determines dominant species. The Work Group would like for the Subcommittee to decide how to determine dominant species and if it should be identified by the species level or species group. The operations manual needs to be clarified concerning this matter. **The Subcommittee determined this was only in there for informational purposes and felt there was no real need for it. P. Choucair moved to no longer put dominant species in the real time data but to keep the separate designations. R. Waller seconded it and it passed.**

J. Rester said the Work Group would like to add a size class distribution of the shrimp catch to the real time data. They would also like to change finfish catch to everything besides commercial shrimp species. They would also like to explore the possibility of using GIS shrimp and other catch abundance level maps for next year's end of year real time summary, along with a map of bottom dissolved oxygen levels. They also feel there is no need to have chlorophyll on the real time data collection sheets because that is not useful to shrimpers. **M. Leiby moved to accept these recommendations relative to real time data. R. Waller seconded and it passed.**

P. Choucair asked if the Subcommittee will do the real time snapper summary again this fall. M. McDuff suggested producing an end of cruise report for each survey. **R. Waller moved to not do the snapper real time summary but include it in an end of survey report. P. Choucair seconded it and it passed.** J. Hanifen asked J. Rester to contact the Data Coordinating Work Group and ask them what information should be in an end of cruise report. The Subcommittee will discuss the recommendations at the October meeting.

J. Rester said the next item discussed was the SEAMAP data collection sheets. M. McDuff stated SEAMAP no longer needs to fit every survey on the same data sheet. He wanted to solicit input into what each Work Group member thought was important information to collect on the data sheets. M. McDuff then demonstrated a new data entry program and asked the type of layout everyone preferred. The Work Group agreed that the forms and the layout of the data entry program should match. The Work Group also recommended that redundant information should be dropped whenever possible. Joanne Shultz stated that she would talk to the Plankton Work Group about how to classify the levels of *Sargassum* and Terry Romaine stated that she would talk to the Environmental Data Work Group to determine how they want to record the CTD casts.

Finally, the Work Group discussed data collection protocols. The Work Group decided that it was better to wait until the data sheets were finalized before changing the operations manual. M. McDuff asked that after January 1, 2004, for everyone to start using a four digit cruise number. The first two digits being the year, the last two the cruise within the year. **The Subcommittee accepted all of the recommendations.**

### **Other Business**

R. Waller distributed a memo from Bruce Comyns on bluefin tuna collections during the spring plankton survey and discussed the results.

**There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:55 a.m.**

APPROVED BY *Dale Theiling* 8/4/04  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**SEAMAP - GULF, SOUTH ATLANTIC  
AND CARIBBEAN SUBCOMMITTEES  
JOINT MINUTES  
Myrtle Beach, SC  
August 6, 2003**

Chairman A. Rosario called the meeting to order at 1:15 p.m. The following members and others were present:

**Members:**

Richard Waller, USM/CMS/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
John Merriner, NMFS-SEFSC, Beaufort, NC  
Henry Ansley, GADNR, Brunswick, GA  
Jeanne Boylan, SCDNR, Charleston, SC  
Darlene Haverkamp, FWC/FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Terry Henwood, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
James Hanifen, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Steve Heath, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Mark Leiby, FWC/FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Stu Kennedy, GMFMC, St. Petersburg, FL  
Paul Choucair, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Dale Theiling, SCDNR, Charleston, SC  
Aida Rosario, FRL/PR-DNER, Mayaguez, PR

**Others:**

Ellie F. Roche, NMFS/SERO, St. Petersburg, FL

**Staff:**

Scott Nichols, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Cynthia Binkley, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Karen Mitchell, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Mark McDuff, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Geoffrey White, ASMFC, Washington, DC  
Edgardo Ojeda, UPR Sea Grant, Mayaguez, PR  
Jeff Rester, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Cheryl Noble, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

**Adoption of Agenda**

Under 4C, Dale Theiling stated he would give the South Atlantic report instead of Henry Ansley. With this change, the agenda was adopted.

### **Approval of Minutes**

The August 7-8, 2002 minutes were approved as submitted.

### **Overview of SEAMAP-Caribbean**

A. Rosario reported the USVI lobster post-larvae recruitment project was completed and they were working on the final report. The report should be forwarded to the regional office in September 2003. The Lobster survey fieldwork will be finished by January 2004 in Puerto Rico. After all the data was analyzed, they will submit a completion report.

She said that both the USVI and Puerto Rico have undertaken a survey that would assess the whelk populations. This gastropod has been exploited both commercially and recreationally in the Caribbean for several years, but very little data was available. Both the USVI and Puerto Rico have proposed management measures to protect this resource, but data is needed regarding its biology and population. Fieldwork started in St. Croix in May 2003 where several transects were completed. St. Thomas has not started the fieldwork at the present time (August 2003). The survey started in July in Puerto Rico. Several potential survey areas around the coasts of Puerto Rico have been identified.

Other areas to be sampled are Mona, Desecheo, Caja de Muerto, and the Vieques Islands. She said personnel identified the areas to be sampled and were trained to test the sample protocol and identify the species, including juveniles.

A service contract will be issued to analyze the reef fish data collected by the USVI to determine if the samples were adequate to make an assessment of their fishery resources. Data from the SEAMAP reef fish surveys conducted in the Caribbean were provided to the contractor preparing the Essential Fish Habitat Environmental Impact Statement for the Caribbean Fishery Management Council.

Through the administrative portion of the program, a quality control project of the data management was undertaken. A graduate student (at the present time Dr. Francisco Pagon) of the University of Puerto Rico Marine Science Department was contracted to evaluate the data entered into the SEAMAP database. A copy of the report and the recommendations made to SEAMAP Caribbean Committee were forwarded to the SEAMAP Database Manager and Dr. Scott Nichols.

### **Overview of SEAMAP-Gulf**

Jim Hanifen reported the Fall Plankton cruise was conducted from August 28 - September 21, 2002. Alabama, NMFS, Mississippi, and Louisiana sampled 109 stations on the west Florida shelf and northern Gulf of Mexico. The objective of this survey was to collect ichthyoplankton samples with bongo and neuston gear for the purpose of estimating abundance and defining the distribution of eggs, larvae, and small juveniles of Gulf of Mexico fishes, particularly king and Spanish mackerel, lutjanids and sciaenids.

The Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Survey was conducted from October 12 - December 5, 2002, from off Mobile, Alabama to the U.S.-Mexican border. Vessels sampled waters out to 60 fm, covering 367 trawl stations and 59 plankton stations. Environmental sampling was also done. The objectives of the survey were to sample the northern Gulf of Mexico to determine abundance and distribution of demersal organisms from inshore waters to 60 fm, obtain length-frequency measurements for major finfish and shrimp species to determine population size structures, collect environmental data to investigate potential relationships between abundance and distribution of organisms and environmental parameters, and collect ichthyoplankton samples to determine relative abundance and distribution of eggs and larvae of commercially and recreationally important fish species. Data from this Survey were used to produce red snapper real-time plots. These plots described research trawl effort and catch rates for juvenile red snapper during the Survey. This was the fifth year the plots were produced and distributed.

The Spring Plankton Survey took place from May 12 - May 31, 2003. One hundred seventeen stations were sampled from the west Florida shelf to the Louisiana/Texas border. This was the twenty-second year for the survey. The objectives of the survey were to collect ichthyoplankton samples for estimates of the abundance and distribution of Atlantic bluefin tuna larvae and collect environmental data at all ichthyoplankton stations.

The Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey took place from June 2 - July 27, 2003. This was the twenty-second year for this survey also. Objectives of the survey were to monitor size and distribution of penaeid shrimp during or prior to migration of brown shrimp from bays to the open Gulf, aid in evaluating the "Texas Closure" management measure of the Gulf Council's Shrimp Fishery Management Plan, and provide information on shrimp and groundfish stocks across the northern Gulf of Mexico from inshore waters to 50 fm. The overall sampling strategy was to work from the eastern Gulf to the Texas/Mexico border, in order to sample during or prior to migration of brown shrimp from bays to the open Gulf area. Real-time shrimp data were again produced from the survey. Catches of shrimp and finfish were reported weekly from the survey and plots and catch rates were distributed to interested individuals.

Finally, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council decided not to use SEAMAP data in the Council's Essential Fish Habitat Environmental Impact Statement. The contractor preparing the EIS stated that SEAMAP data was not in a GIS format and it would require a substantial analytical effort to convert the survey results into interpolated distribution and/or density polygons in a GIS. The Gulf Subcommittee disagreed with this and this morning they reviewed ways SEAMAP data can easily be used to map species distributions and abundance levels.

### **Overview of SEAMAP-South Atlantic**

D. Theiling reported the South Atlantic had several projects ongoing. The Bottom Mapping Work Group continued work and decided to extend the bottom mapping efforts to expand to a 2,000 meter contour, it had been 200. The purpose of the bottom mapping program was to accumulate existing data on the bottom structure and bottom type from various sources to find ways to make it usable as a SEAMAP data product. There were three phases to this project. The first was to develop protocols

for data transformation, i.e., take existing data, put it in formats comparable to one another and usable for SEAMAP purposes. That phase should end in December 2003 and it does not involve any new data collection, simply acquisition of existing data sources. Phase II was to compile those data and to use protocols developed in Phase I to make the data available to SEAMAP data management. After completion, a data report was produced and is now available on the ASMFC web site only, it will not be printed as a document for distribution. Phase III will be the most exciting and progressive of the three phases. By using a small amount of SEAMAP funds that would co-op with a much larger source of funds from ESDIM over a three-year period the data accumulated through the ESDIM funding would be incorporated into the SEAMAP program. ESDIM funding has been postponed and will not be available until the next calendar year. This is the phase that will actually expand the bottom mapping project out to 2,000 meters.

The Crustacean Work Group was involved in developing an international shrimp and crab symposium that was held with the Crustacean Society. Their current effort will be to accumulate blue crab fishery independent data that is available to evaluate the blue crab resources on the Atlantic coast. The South Atlantic Board of the ASMFC will submit a report on the information and make it available to everybody in the Atlantic states that may have concerns about blue crabs.

The data management effort continues and is primarily involved in improving the management of all SEAMAP data, specifically the shallow water trawl surveys. The South Atlantic's largest project is the Shallow Water Trawl Survey and it continues as planned. One hundred and two stations were sampled on each of the three cruises and those cruises covered nearshore shallow water areas from Cape Hatteras to Cape Canaveral.

Finally, the operations plan has been modified to show changes that have been discussed today, primarily the inclusion of the 200 to 2,000 meter depth zone as the area to the bottom mapping program called the deep water mapping program.

### **Overview of NMFS**

S. Nichols introduced Karen Mitchell who has replaced Perry Thompson as the Technical Monitor for SEAMAP. He reported all surveys took place as planned except for the trap video survey in the Gulf of Mexico due to losing a vessel. The survey was now scheduled to take place in the fall, not spring/summer, on a smaller vessel but he does not know if that will be done on a continuing basis.

### **Status of FY2003 Funds**

S. Nichols reported that SEAMAP should be level funded again.

### **Proposed Activities and Budget Needs for FY2003**

**A. Caribbean** - A. Rosario stated they would continue activities with level funding which is \$145,000. She stated they would like to incorporate St. Croix in the sampling component with the

St. Thomas survey so in the event that SEAMAP receives additional funding, they would like money to fund that.

**B. Gulf** - J. Hanifen stated the Gulf would try to maintain all current programs with the same amount of funding which is \$612,403.

**C. South Atlantic** - D. Theiling stated they need additional funding but will try to continue at \$375,387.

**D. NMFS** - S. Nichols stated NMFS would continue current programs for the same amount of funding which is \$220,510. He asked that if there are any adjustments within the components to please send them in to Cynthia and him.

#### **Grant Reporting Requirements/Timing**

C. Binkley reported the multi-year award was very successful. She said she would not need anything from anyone this year unless they have a change in the plans for the second year. She said everyone would receive the award document (CD451) when the second year funds were available. The reporting requirements will remain the same and when she gets the CD451 she will attach another copy of the schedule and distribute. She said everyone was on an annual reporting period that does not coincide with the budget period and if this was too confusing, there is the option of going semi-annual. She asked that if possible, to please send all future correspondence, forms, etc. via email except the applications.

#### **Discussion of Coordinated Fishery Independent Activities**

D. Donaldson reported there is a white paper on Coordinated Fishery Independent Activities in the packet distributed for this meeting. He said that at the last meeting modifications were made to the program to broaden the goals and objectives, and the changes were taken to each of the component's management bodies. The South Atlantic Board had some issues with the proposed changes and the program in general, so the white paper was developed to address their concerns. G. White stated the South Atlantic component would recommend to the board to approve the revised goals and objectives after two clarifications were made. They want to make it clear that restoration is the first priority with new funding, and then prioritize new goals and objectives. After the new language was developed, D. Donaldson will incorporate it into the white paper and the components will meet via email or conference call to vote on the changes. If the changes are approved, they will discuss the next phase of the project. D. Donaldson will give an update at the next joint meeting.

#### **Data Management Issues**

M. McDuff reported the SEAMAP Oracle database is now online and they are in the process of testing the system and setting up user ids and passwords. The Taxonomic Ad Hoc Committee developed a draft system that the Gulf and South Atlantic approved and it has been given to ITIS in Washington to integrate into their system. ITIS are developing protocols for adding new definitions

into the system. When this is finished, the full taxonomic name will be used instead of the old 13 character abbreviations and there will no longer be a biocode associated with each taxon. He said the data entry system has been changed to a Microsoft Access program and each vessel will be self-contained. He then demonstrated the software and stated they will start installing it on the various vessels in the near future. He informed the Subcommittee that anyone could go to [www.mslabs.noaa.gov](http://www.mslabs.noaa.gov) and review the demo for the data entry system. He said to send any suggestions and comments to him on the new system.

#### **Planning for 2004 Joint Annual Meeting**

A. Rosario stated the next meeting will be in Puerto Rico and asked for any preferences. She will check on prices for the west or southwest of Puerto Rico and inform the coordinators to make the final decision. The Subcommittee agreed to have the meeting during the first week of August.

M. McDuff said he would coordinate a meeting in the near future with representatives from the three components to discuss data management issues.

G. White suggested the Subcommittee develop a definition to make the separation of analyzing and summarizing the data. The Subcommittee decided that with the current technology and future technology, a definition would be obsolete within a couple of years. It is easier to present the data in different ways but it will not be a full analysis and the Subcommittee will make that clear by defining exactly what was done to create the tables or maps that are presented.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:25 p.m.

**STATE/FEDERAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE  
MINUTES**

**Thursday, August 21, 2003  
New Orleans, Louisiana**

Facilitator Larry Simpson called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. The following members and staff were present:

**Members**

Ginny Vail, FFWCC, Tallahassee, FL  
Vernon Minton, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL  
Corky Perret, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
John Roussel, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Mike Ray, TPWD, Austin, TX  
Buck Sutter, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL (proxy for R. Crabtree)  
Rita Curtis, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD  
Peter Thompson, NMFS, Miami, FL  
John Forester, USFWS, Baton Rouge, LA (proxy for C. Brown)  
Larry Simpson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

**Staff**

Ron Lukens, Assistant Director  
David Donaldson, Data Program Manager

**Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was approved with the addition of discussion of confidentiality issues and FWS leadership update.

**Discussion and Final Approval of FIN Funding Activities for 2004**

L. Simpson provided a brief overview regarding the status of 2004 funding for data collection and management activities. He stated that there is currently a \$3.5M mark for GulfFIN and \$3.45M mark for the Recreational Fisheries Harvesting (RecFIN) line item in the House. The Senate has not taken any action on the budget so far this year.

D. Donaldson provided a summary of the activities for potential funding in 2004. A list developed by the FIN Committee was presented to the group. The list is attached (Attachment A). The group then discussed the various jobs identified in the draft statement of work. Job 1 consists of coordination and administration of FIN activities and will provide for the coordination, planning, and administration of FIN activities throughout the year as well as provide recreational and commercial information to the FIN participants and other interested personnel. Job 2 pertains to the collection, management and dissemination of marine recreational fisheries data. This job will provide for the conduct of the MRFSS survey in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida for shore, for-hire, and private modes and for-hire field intercepts in Texas. This task will provide for coordination of the survey, field intercept survey of shore, for-hire and private boat anglers to estimate angler catch using the existing MRFSS methodology, and entry of the data. The states will also conduct weekly



telephone calls to a 10% random sample of the Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida charter boat captains to obtain estimates of charter boat fishing effort as well as social-economic data. It was noted that Texas has modified the for-hire telephone survey to include only charter vessels that operate offshore. Texas believes that their current creel survey adequately samples the inshore for-hire fishery so there was not a need to sample them via the telephone survey. Job 3 refers to head boat port sampling in Texas, Louisiana, and Florida and will provide for the sampling of catches, collection of catch reports from head boat personnel, and gathering effort data on head boats along the coasts of Texas, Louisiana, and Florida. Job 4 consists of Gulf menhaden port sampling and will provide for sampling of gulf menhaden catches from menhaden purse-seine vessels that operate in Louisiana. Job 5 refers to the development and implementation of the FIN Data Management System (DMS) which will provide for further implementation of the data management system for the FIN including routine loading of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida commercial catch/effort data, Gulf biological data, Gulf recreational data; and maintenance of the DMS. Job 6 consists of the development and operation of the trip ticket program in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Job 7 refers to the collection of biological data. This job will provide funding for collection of biological data from the recreational and commercial fisheries. Data collection efforts will focus on red snapper, king mackerel, gulf and southern flounder and greater amberjack. That concluded all of the on-going activities. The new activities included dockside and at-sea sampling of head boats for catch information. Alabama was the only state that provided a statement of work and budget for this activity and they provided projects at two different sampling levels (5% and 10%). Another new project was trip ticket implementation and operation in Texas. Since there are no additional funds and Texas is still determining the feasibility of using a trip ticket program, they did not provide a statement of work and budget. It was estimated that it would cost approximately \$1M to start up a trip ticket program in Texas. The last new project was a social/economic data collection project for the inshore shrimp fishery. V. Minton provided some comments regarding the proposal to staff. The group then discussed some of the details of the proposed work. It was pointed out that some of these issues could be resolved if FIN developed a social/economic data collection plan. After some discussion, the group decided to defer the discussion until later in the meeting when the group will discuss the development of the data collection plan.

The group then looked at the total cost of the on-going activities. The total funds available from the GulfFIN and RecFIN line items equal \$4.355M. In the past, NOAA/NMFS has "taxed" (at 5%) the GulfFIN line item. It was noted that with increased costs, the necessary funds for the proposed activities in 2004 exceeded the total amount available (assuming a 5% tax on the GulfFIN line item) by approximately \$95K. With the current financial climate, it was pointed out that FIN should utilize all available funding. It was suggested that NMFS could waive the tax and this would provide funds to pay for the existing jobs under FIN. After some discussion, **C. Perret moved that staff write a letter to NMFS leadership requesting they waive the 5% tax on the GulfFIN line item. The motion was seconded and passed with NMFS abstaining.** If the tax is not assessed, the total amount of funding available for 2004 will be \$4.355M. The group decided to use this figure (\$4.355M) as the planning figure for finalization of the 2004 FIN cooperative agreement. It was also suggested that the head boat pilot survey (at 10% sampling) in Alabama be included in the 2004 FIN cooperative agreement. After some discussion, **C. Perret moved that the 2004 FIN cooperative agreement should be submitted for the funding levels outlined on the spreadsheet (Attachment**

**B). This included the pilot survey for head boat to be conducted in Alabama. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.** The final allocation of funds for the 2004 FIN cooperative agreement is attached (Attachment B). This table also includes the detailed effort pilot survey that was approved by the S/FFMC via e-mail.

The Committee then discussed the various contingencies regarding funding. After some discussion, the group decided that if the available amount were significantly higher or lower than the planning figure (\$4.355M), the Committee would get together and determine how to redistribute the funds.

#### **Discussion of Social/Economic Data Collection Plan Development**

D. Donaldson stated that the FIN Committee discussed the collection of social/economic data and the related problems with these data at their last meeting. At that meeting, the group noted that it has been difficult to develop data collection projects for social and economic data for commercial fisheries. Although everyone realized that the collection of these data is very important, it has been hard for FIN to identify specific issues and topics to focus on for the development of collection activities. It was stated that FIN could develop a social/economic data collection plan to help FIN in developing appropriate activities. From those FIN Committee discussions, it was suggested that this issue be presented to the S/FFMC and ask the S/FFMC if they believed there was a need to develop such a plan. D. Donaldson noted that the purpose of the social/economic data collection plan is to help guide FIN in developing social and economic data collection projects and outline the priorities for such projects. After some discussion, the Committee believed that the development of a data collection plan would be beneficial to FIN and directed staff to convene the appropriate work group to develop such a plan.

#### **Discussion of Confidential Issues**

J. Roussel stated that there have been various requests for Louisiana trip ticket data but Louisiana has always been able to deny the requests based on the fact that these data are confidential.

The latest request came from the IRS and Louisiana has been trying to deny access to the IRS. During this situation, it was determined that, based on the existing state and federal statutes, protection of confidential data only resides in the Magnuson Act. Furthermore, only data that are required for federally managed species (under fishery management plans) are protected by the confidentiality regulations outline in the Magnuson Act. The Louisiana state statutes regarding confidentiality rely on the confidential provisions in the Magnuson Act. Therefore, there is the potential problem that data collected regarding state-managed species via the trip ticket program may not be protected under the current confidentiality laws. He stated that in spring 2004, language would be filed during the legislative session to fix the problem, however, the group needs to examine this issue to ensure that other states are not in the same situation and develop some solutions to the issue. It would be beneficial for the group to see the various state statutes regarding confidentiality. After some discussion, it was decided that states would send their statutes regarding confidentiality to staff and staff would compile and distribute the information to the Committee. It was also suggested that the additional cites be added to the FIN cooperative agreement, state subcontracts, and existing data confidentiality Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the five Gulf States, NMFS and GSMFC. This issue will be further discussed at the upcoming GSMFC meeting in Corpus Christi, Texas.

### **Review and Approval of Caribbean Data Confidentiality MOA**

D. Donaldson distributed a draft data confidentiality MOA between Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, GSMFC, and NMFS. He stated that the purpose of the MOA is to allow the Caribbean to utilize the FIN data management system by providing access to data (from the Caribbean region). It is similar to the agreement established between the five Gulf States, NMFS, and GSMFC. The MOA has been signed by NMFS and the U.S. Virgin Islands and will be presented to the Commissioners at the GSMFC meeting in October, for their consideration. Based on the discussion under the previous agenda item, it was suggested that additional cites of federal legislation regarding confidentiality be added to the MOA. This will ensure that the protection of the data does not solely rely on the Magnuson Act. It was also suggested that the Gulf data confidentiality MOA be updated to ensure proper protection. This issue will be further discussed at the S/FFMC and Commission Business meeting in October.

### **Follow-up on Red Snapper Mortality from Oil/Gas Structure Removals**

D. Donaldson stated that at the last Commission meeting, J. Rester provided some red snapper mortality figures related to the removal of oil and gas structures. Staff was tasked with compiling additional information about this topic. J. Rester has lined up a presentation (by Gregg Gitschlag from NMFS) on this topic for the upcoming October meeting and he wanted some feedback about the need for this presentation. After some discussion, the group agreed that this presentation would be useful and asked J. Rester to schedule G. Gitschlag for the presentation in October.

### **Other Business**

R. Lukens distributed a draft memorandum of understanding (MOU) to the group regarding Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership. The intent of the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership is to develop State and Federal partnerships that will extend beyond the traditional boundaries of resource management agencies and establish a commitment to truly work for the benefit of the resource. R. Lukens pointed out that signing the MOU only signifies the agency's willingness to participate in the partnership. It does not require that an agency provide financial support. However, since there is no dedicated funding for this program yet, leadership is asking each agency to voluntarily contribute \$20K in order to keep this initiative moving. Although the group believed this initiative was beneficial, there was concern about each signatory agency providing \$20K. There were questions about how the funds would be utilized and who would be responsible for the money. R. Lukens stated that the funds would be used to pay for travel to the planning meetings. It was also suggested that instead of providing actual funds, agencies could pay travel costs for their representatives to attend the planning meetings. Although this does not provide funds to the program, it helps defer the costs of conducting the meetings. After some discussion, it was suggested that a presentation regarding this program be given at the S/FFMC meeting in October. The group then reviewed the document and provided several comments to R. Lukens. It was pointed out that the MOU would be presented to the Commissioners in October for their consideration and approval.

**Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 1:35 p.m.**



## ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION IN 2004

### **High Priority**

Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities (ongoing)  
Collecting, Managing and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data (ongoing)  
    Charter Boat Survey Offshore Texas (ongoing)  
Head Boat Port Sampling in Texas, Louisiana, and Florida (ongoing)  
    Implementation of For-Hire Telephone Survey (effort) and Field Sampling (catch) (new)  
Gulf Menhaden Port Sampling (ongoing)  
Development and Implementation of FIN Data Management System (ongoing)  
Trip Ticket Program Implementation and Operations in Mississippi (ongoing)  
Trip Ticket Program Implementation and Operations in Texas (new)  
Trip Ticket Program Operations in Alabama (ongoing)  
Trip Ticket Program Operations in Louisiana (ongoing)  
Recreational/Commercial Biological Sampling (ongoing)  
Collection of Social/Economic Data of Inshore Shrimp Fishermen (new)

### **Medium Priority**

Collection of Detailed Effort for Commercial Fisheries  
Pilot Study for Bycatch Data Collection

### **Low Priority**

Biological Sampling for Additional Species

## Attachment B

ACTIVITY		2004
HIGH PRIORITY		COST
Admin and coordination of FIN (Job1)		\$376,260
Recreational data collection (Job 2)		
Texas	\$76,168	
Louisiana	\$323,159	
Mississippi	\$178,992	
Alabama	\$142,143	
Florida	\$1,358,176	
GSMFC	\$219,549	
Rec survey subtotal		\$2,298,187
Head boat sampling (Job 3)		
Louisiana	\$28,811	
Alabama	\$25,331	
Florida	\$80,913	
Contractual - TX sampler	\$38,211	
Head boat subtotal		\$173,266
Menhaden sampling (Job 4)		
Menhaden - Louisiana	\$31,931	
Contractual - LA sampler	\$0	
Menhaden subtotal		\$31,931
FIN DMS (Job 5)		\$223,441
Trip ticket programs (Job 6)		
Louisiana	\$386,643	
Mississippi	\$72,173	
Alabama	\$109,519	
Contractual - SCBI	\$79,970	
Trip ticket subtotal		\$648,305
Biological sampling collection (Job 7)		
Contractual - TX samplers	\$73,709	
Texas	\$17,568	
Louisiana	\$138,866	
Mississippi	\$43,424	
Alabama	\$102,177	
Florida	\$173,567	
Biol sampling subtotal		\$549,311
Detailed effort pilot survey (Job 8)		\$50,364
GRAND TOTAL		\$4,351,046

Caribbean Port Sampler Meeting  
Meeting Summary  
October 1-2, 2003  
Puerto Real, Puerto Rico

The meeting was called to order at 9:00 a.m. and the following people were present:

Willie Ventura, USVIDFW, St. Croix, VI  
Toby Tobias, USVIDFW, St. Croix, VI  
Roger Uwate, USVIDFW, St. Thomas, USVI  
Ruth Gomez, USVIDFW, St. Thomas, USVI  
Jason Vasques, USVIDFW, St. Thomas, USVI  
Shenell Gordon, USVIDFW, St. Thomas, USVI  
Hector Lopez Pelet, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR  
Luis Riveria, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR  
Wilfredo Torres, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR  
Walter Irizarry, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR  
Jesus Leon, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR  
Milagros Cartagena, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR  
Lucia Vargas, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR  
Noemi Pena, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR  
Daniel Matos, PRDNER, Mayaguez, PR  
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Approval of Agenda

The agenda was approved as written.

Status of ComFIN

D. Donaldson gave an overview of the Fisheries Information Network (FIN). He stated that FIN consists of two major components: ComFIN and RecFIN (SE). He discussed the various activities that FIN has recently undertaken including collection of recreational data, implementation of trip tickets, collection of detailed effort from commercial fisheries, biological sampling, and implementation of the FIN data management system (DMS). In 2004, a pilot survey in Alabama to collect catch and bycatch data via at-sea sampling from head boats will be conducted. This pilot will test the feasibility of at-sea sampling for collecting bycatch and recommendations will be developed and presented to FIN regarding the methodology. He stated that trip ticket programs implemented in states except Mississippi and Texas. Mississippi has implemented oyster, bait shrimp and finfish and are working on other components of the commercial fisheries in the future. Texas is still evaluating effectiveness of trip ticket program to collect commercial data in their state. One of the innovations is the implementation of electronic trip ticket reporting. Through a contractor, GSMFC has been working with dealers in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida to allow for the electronic reporting of data. This is a more efficient and less time consuming method for collecting the data. Currently, there are almost 170 commercial dealers utilizing the system. A pilot study regarding the collection of detailed effort is being conducted in Louisiana. Information such as

multiple gear and area fished, quantity of gear, days at sea, number of crew, fishing time, etc. are being collected by NMFS and in 2004, Louisiana personnel will be collecting the same data for the blue crab fishery. The FIN DMS is currently on-line and it contains a variety of commercial and recreational data as well as biological samples and SEAMAP (fishery-independent) data. Users must complete the appropriate forms and can access both confidential and non-confidential data. In order for Caribbean personnel to utilize the system, a Data Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands, GSMFC and NMFS needs to be implemented. These agencies have been working on putting the MOA into place. Recently, an issue arose in the Gulf and the Commission decided that additional legislative cites needed to be added to the Gulf MOA (as well as the Caribbean MOA). Therefore, the current Caribbean MOA needs to be modified and undergo legal review from the various agencies.

#### Status of Yellowtail Snapper Assessment

G. Davenport stated that he was unable to get an update regarding the yellowtail snapper assessment. There are some issues concerning the landings and he will meet with personnel working on the assessment and notify the group regarding its status. He then provided an overview of the NMFS commercial data collection activities. There are currently 29 federal port agents from Florida to Texas. One of the programs these agents are working on is the Gulf Shrimp program. With the implementation of trip ticket programs, the landings information that port samplers collected was also being collected via the trip ticket programs. Therefore, their tasks have been modified and they are focusing on increasing the number of interviews for collecting detailed effort data from shrimp fishermen. The sampling target is to collect data from 10% of all the shrimp trips. Unfortunately, due to lack of cooperation from the fishermen, only 2-3% of the trips are being sampled. Also, the port agents are providing updates to the trip ticket data. NMFS publishes the Market News, which provided information about total landings and price/pound on a monthly basis. NMFS port agents are working with the states samplers and GSMFC to collect otoliths for a variety of species. The targets (developed by FIN) were established in 2001 and FIN decided to stay with these targets since not stock assessments have been conducted since the start of this activity. Once assessments have been conducted, the group can examine if not enough or too much samples have been collected and make the appropriate modifications. The port agents are also involved in quota monitoring by helping fishermen/dealers provide the necessary data. NMFS currently has quotas in the Gulf for shallow and deep-water groupers, Spanish and king mackerel and red snapper and tilefish, wreckfish and the snapper/grouper complex in the South Atlantic. NMFS continues to collect data regarding the operating units in the various fisheries. These data are critical because they provide a tally of the number of vessels operating in fisheries. It is very important that these numbers are accurate since under- or overestimation can affect the effort estimates. The TIP program is moving into on-line data entry. At the Gulf port samplers meeting, the group will be testing the system. It was pointed out that fast access to the Internet is needed to effectively utilize this system. NMFS has begun the implementation of a shrimp vessel registration system. This will allow managers to get an accurate count of the number of vessels operating in the shrimp fishery although the industry has expressed some concerns about the program. And NMFS has recently adopted new TED regulations that expand the size of TEDs.

#### Data Collection Recommendations

D. Donaldson stated that at the 2002 Caribbean port samplers meeting, the group developed a



variety of recommendations regarding the collection of data in Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands. At this meeting, the group discussed the status of the recommendations and Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands gave an update.

D. Matos stated that Puerto Rico has implemented a trip ticket program, beginning in January 2003. Each fisherman is responsible for reporting his trip-level data to the Department. If multiple trips are reported on a ticket, the ticket is returned to the fisherman and he must fix the problem and sent the fixed ticket back to the Department. Trip ticket number has also been added to the reporting form so it can be tracked over time. Puerto Rico is also providing updates to the historical TIP data. D. Matos noted that fishermen must return the trip ticket information before 60 days. After that 60-day period, the data are rejected since after that amount of time, the data are suspect and may not reflect the actual catch. G. Davenport pointed out that these data should not be automatically rejected since there can be legitimate reasons for turning in data past the deadline. Although rejecting the data automatically prevents "bad" data from getting into the system, it might also inadvertently throw out legitimate data. He stated that the data should be examined before rejecting it so potentially "good" data are not lost. He explained that it is somewhat problematic keeping tracking of the commercial fishermen. It was noted that commercial fishermen are only licensed ever 4 years. Because of that fact, it makes it difficult to know who is actually participating in the fisheries. Although fishermen are licensed every 4 years, boat registration is every year. And he mentioned that Puerto Rico has submitted a proposal to MARFIN regarding the collection of bycatch data in Puerto Rico.

R. Uwate reviewed the status (as of 2000) of the commercial data collected in U.S. Virgin Islands. For 1974 to 1986, there are no data files and the status is unknown. For 1986 to 1992, there are annual data files and it is organized into 6 to 9 columns. There are also hard copies of the data but they are unorganized or poorly organized. For 1992 to 2000, the all the data from St. Thomas/St. John has been entered and proofed. For St. Croix, 4 years of data has been entered, but not proofed (1993-1998). The four other years of St. Croix data not have not been entered or proofed. Most of the U.S. Virgin Islands Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) data files from 1986 to 2000 are not available or organized at a single location. The available DFW data files are in various formats: (1) Dbase, (2) Excel, (3) Paradox, (4) FoxPro, and (5) QuatroPro. In addition, the available data file fields are not consistent or uniform. He reviewed the catch record forms utilized by U.S. Virgin Islands and noted the changes that have occurred over the years. He provided an overview of the USVI Fishing Areas from the early 1990 to present and showed how these areas have varied over time. He then provided a current status of the data (as of September 2003). Old catch report forms (from 1974 to 1986) were found by DFW personnel. These reports were never entered into a computer database. NOAA/Fisheries provided support to DFW personnel to organize and enter these historic data files. The DFW personnel entered and proofed all available catch report data into Excel data files. All data files are now similar in format. In addition, DFW personnel completed compliance data files (list of fishers indicating which month reports were submitted) for all of these years. All of these data have been submitted to NOAA/Fisheries. For the data from 1986 to 1992 as well as 1992 to 2000, DFW personnel searched over 500 floppy disks and several old computers and located many data files for this period. The most complete data files were selected and converted to Excel. The DFW personnel assembled a summary spreadsheet and submitted it to NOAA/Fisheries for comparison with their data files. NOAA/Fisheries reviewed data files and identified data cells (such as out of range data or date) that needed checking. The DFW personnel spot-checked data and identified any problems with the data. There were also problems with different data base structure

size (6 to 9 columns vs. 20 columns). The DFW personnel identified all available hard copies and organized them by district, year, and fisher. Recently, DFW personnel are attempting to get support for entry of missing data into data files and make them comparable to the 1974/86 data formats. The DFW personnel completed verification of St. Thomas/St. John 1992/1993 and 1994/1995 data files and made respective compliance sheets. In addition, they completed entry and proofing of catch data from St. Croix (1992/1993, 1997/1998, 1999/2000 and 2000/2001) and completed proofing 1993/1994 data from St. Croix. They also began verification of the data file from St. Thomas/St. John (1995/1996) and construction of the associated compliance sheet and began proofing of data from St. Croix (1994/1995 and 1995/1996). For 2000 to present, the data from 2000/2001 and 2001/2002 has been entered, proofed and submitted to NOAA/Fisheries. For 2002/2003 data, the DFW personnel have completed entry of the data from St. Thomas/St. John (2002/2003) and the data are being proofed. Personnel have completed 80% of data entry for the data from St. Croix (2002/2003). It was pointed out that in some years, 2 or 3 different commercial catch report forms were used to collect data. This makes compatibility of data files and future comparisons difficult. Also, the catch report forms have change over time, i.e. in 2003/2004, a bycatch column has been added to the form for the first time. In 2003, NOAA/Fisheries approved funding for a fisheries biologist III database position. An individual has been selected and paperwork is being finalized. Guidance and recommendations such as those provided at the last Caribbean Port Samplers meeting can be useful, however, based on the presentation here, it should be apparent that there remains much effort to get existing data to the point where they can be compared and analyzed. The DFW monitors and assesses the fisheries and marine resources of the U.S. Virgin Islands. Information is the basis for management of these resources. In the U.S. Virgin Islands, catch report data has been collected for about three decades.

#### Round Table Discussions/Next Meeting

D. Donaldson asked the group if there were issues that needed to be discussed. The group was very interested in the shrimp industry in the Gulf of Mexico. The group also discussed establishing some type of outreach program to inform fishermen about fisheries management and how the data that is collected is utilized in the management process. R. Uwate pointed out that the Caribbean Council has provided the U.S. Virgin Islands a grant to conduct a fishermen census in the U.S. Virgin Islands. This grant will identify all commercial fishermen operating in the U.S. Virgin Islands. The group also discussed the upcoming GCFI meeting. It was noted that several papers regarding activities in Puerto Rico and U.S. Virgin Islands would be presented at this meeting. After some discussion, the group decided that the next meeting would be held during the first week of October 2004 in Galveston, Texas. Some of the topics to be discussed included the papers being presented at the GCFI meeting and a Gulf shrimp program overview. The field trip would involve visiting several shrimping ports in the Galveston area. The meeting would be held at the NMFS laboratory in Galveston.

**The meeting was recessed at 11:44 a.m.**

#### Field Sampling

In the afternoon, the group visited various dealers and fishermen to observe fishing activities in the eastern Puerto Rico area of Farjardo. The species encountered included conch and spiny lobster as well as a visit to one of the largest marinas in Puerto Rico.

**October 2, 2003**

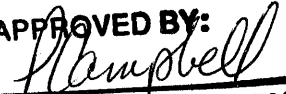
**The meeting reconvened at 8:30 a.m.**

Field Sampling

The group spent the entire day toured the fish stores and docks of Vieques. The group rode a ferry to the island in the morning and visited several fish stores to monitor and record the catches at these sites. Species included conch, spiny lobster, and various reef fishes. The group also toured the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Refuge located on the island.

**Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m.**

**DATA MANAGEMENT SUBCOMMITTEE  
MINUTES - 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
Monday, October 13, 2003  
Corpus Christi, Texas**

**APPROVED BY:**  
  
**COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN**

Chairman Page Campbell called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. The following members and others were present:

**Members**

Joe O'Hop, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Vicki Swann, TPWD, Austin, TX  
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Joe Shepard, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS (*Proxy for T. Van Devender*)  
Kevin Anson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Rick Leard, GMFMC, Tampa, FL (*Proxy for S. Atran*)

**Staff**

Larry Simpson, Executive Director  
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director  
David Donaldson, FIN Data Program Manager  
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant

**Others**

Paul Choucair, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD  
Shannon Bettridge, ACCSP, Washington, DC  
Bob Zales, II, PCBA, Panama City, FL  
Bobbi Walker, GMFMC, Orange Beach, AL  
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX  
Jill Jensen, GRN, New Orleans, LA  
Michelle Kasprzak, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA

**Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was approved as written.

**Approval of Minutes**

The minutes for the meeting held on March 17, 2003 in Point Clear, Alabama were approved as written.

### **Discussion of Collection of Birth Date for Registration Tracking Module**

**D. Donaldson** stated that at the recent FIN meeting, there was concern regarding the feasibility of collecting birth date for fishermen and dealers. This data element is essential in the current design of the registration tracking module and without this element, it will not possible to uniquely identify individual fishermen and/or dealers. If this element cannot be collected, FIN needs to revisit this issue and develop an alternative approach for uniquely identifying these participants. **J. Shepard** was concerned that using this system will not uniquely identify an individual. He believes there is a better method (such as using the last four digits of the social security number) for identifying these individuals. It was pointed out that this system (using birth date) is currently being used in New Hampshire and is working quite well. It was suggested that a unique number could be assigned to individuals to identify them in the system. It was pointed out that if this system was for the Gulf of Mexico only, it might work, however, this system needs to work on a national level and the logistics of ensuring that duplicate numbers are not distributed could be very problematic. It was noted that this system has been approved by FIN although ACCSP is still seeking approval of the module. After a lengthy discussion, it was decided that this issue be referred back to the FIN/ACCSP Registration Tracking Work Group to examine alternate methods for uniquely identifying fishermen and dealers. **D. Donaldson** stated that he would convene the group (via conference call) to address this issue.

### **Discussion of Development of More Detailed QA/QC for Data Quality Act**

**D. Donaldson** noted that at the recent FIN meeting, T. Gleason presented an overview of the Data Quality Act (DQA). Since the FIN Committee regularly provides data to NOAA and this data is used to develop information products, this data must be of known quality and consistent with NOAA's Information Quality Guidelines. There was some question regarding the need to further documentation on QA/QC procedures for commercial and recreational data collection activities and this issue was referred to this group for recommendation. **D. Donaldson** noted that a DQA checklist has been distributed to the group. In a discussion with T. Gleason, **D. Donaldson** noted that since all FIN data is subject to QA/QC procedures, it is probably of high enough quality that it will meet NOAA information quality standards, at this time. Therefore, the Subcommittee recommended that additional QA/QC documentation for the FIN data collection activities does not need to be developed at this time.

### **Discussion of Detailed Effort Data Collection Activities in Louisiana**

**J. Shepard** stated that Louisiana was scheduled to conduct a detailed effort survey for the blue crab fishery in 2004. However, due to funding shortfalls, this activity will not be conducted. Although it will not be conducted, J. Shepard still wanted to provide the group with a brief overview of the procedures and methods that were going to be utilized. He distributed a detailed effort sampling sheet to the group, which outlines the data elements that were proposed to be collected such as trip date, trip number, trip ticket type, trip ticket number, gear, quantity of gear, area fished, disposition, days at sea, number of crew, fishing time, and number of sets. He stated that all commercial data collection is based on having a trip ticket program within the state. The trip ticket program defines the sampling universe and from there, sampling for detailed effort, biological samplings, social/economic data, etc can be accomplished. In order to sample, the amount of necessary sampling needs to be determined and the type of information needed to

accomplish this included trip ticket program, area fished, gear used, measure of fishing time, and sampling period. **J. Shepard** presented and explained the formula utilized to determine sample size for the blue crab fishery. Using this formula, J. Shepard developed sampling targets for each of the areas within Louisiana.

#### **Discussion of For-Hire Telephone Survey as "Official" Method**

**D. Donaldson** stated that since the states have now begun collecting effort information from head boats as well as charter boats via the telephone survey, it has been suggested that the name of the effort telephone survey be changed from the Charter Boat Telephone Survey to the For-Hire Telephone Survey. The new name is more accurate in terms of the vessels that are surveyed through the program. **After some discussion, K. Cuevas moved that the survey utilized to collect effort data for the head and charter boats be called For-Hire Telephone Survey. The motion passed unanimously.**

#### **Fishing Tournament Discussions**

**D. Donaldson** stated that at the recent FIN meeting, it was decided that the states needed to examine the feasibility of registering state fishing tournaments. The purpose of this activity was to establish a sampling universe of fishing tournaments and could then be sampled to determine the potential impacts on the resources of fishing tournaments. **D. Donaldson** asked each state about registering tournaments within their jurisdiction. Texas and Mississippi are currently examining the possibility of requiring all fishing tournaments to register their event. Mississippi is actually attempting to pass an annual registration rule. Florida would need to pass some type of regulations to implement this requirement and have been discussing the issue with several groups within the state. And Alabama and Louisiana are not currently exploring the possibility of a registration requirement and would need to pass some type of rule (Alabama) or legislation (Louisiana) to implement such an action. The group discussed various aspects of sampling fishing tournaments. It was noted that fishing tournaments have the potential to have a large impact on the resources. Therefore, data needs to be collected on them to assess this impact. By having each state register tournaments that occur in their jurisdiction, it provides a simple method for sampling these events. It was noted that in order to require tournaments to register, a definition of tournament needs to be developed. After some discussion, the group defined a fishing tournament as any fishing competition involving finfish in which participants must register or otherwise enter and in which a prize or award is offered for catching or landing such fish. **J. Shepard moved that states begin examining registering tournaments, based on the definition that a fishing tournament as any fishing competition involving finfish in which participants must register or otherwise enter and in which a prize or award is offered for catching or landing such fish. The motion passed unanimously.**

#### **Status of Biological Sampling Activities**

**D. Donaldson** distributed a summary of otolith collections for the recreational and commercial fisheries. The summary presents the number of otoliths that have been collected as well as the targets, by species, mode, and state. In addition, a list of otoliths collected from all species (not just the targeted species) was provided to the group. It was noted that there are several species group (fish not identified to species and genus) in the complete list of species sampled. It was

pointed out that collecting otoliths from fish not identified to the species/genus provides no useful data. D. Donaldson will check with G. Bray to ensure that there is not a computer glitch with these fish. **P. Campbell** asked if otoliths collected via the head boat survey in Texas are included in this tally. **D. Donaldson** stated that he does not routinely get information from the head boat survey. He will contact B. Dixon and attempt to establish routine data loads with him. Overall, the collections are going well and most of the agencies are providing the collection data on a timely basis. Most of the states are adhering to the targets and collecting the appropriate amount of otoliths. D. Donaldson stressed the importance of submitting the data in a timely manner so monthly progress reports can be generated and distributed to the agencies. These reports allow the GSMFC, NMFS and states to evaluate the progress of the collection activities and make any needed modifications to sampling activities. **J. Shepard** asked if any of this information has been provided to the SEDAR process. It was stated that no requests for the information has been made although FIN staff will be attending these meetings on a routine basis.

### **State/Federal Reports**

**Texas** - **V. Swann** reported that Texas continues with their buy back program for shrimp, crab and finfish. It is round 13 for shrimp and round 4 for both crab and finfish. The goal of the shrimp buy back program is to reduce the fleet by 50 percent. With the latest round, approximately 31% of the shrimp fleet has been bought out. Because of the buy back and crab trap removal programs, the crab fishery in Texas appears to be rebounding. Texas received \$5.5M for the shrimp disaster relief program and they have processed about 1,200 applications and the checks should be mailed next week. Texas has shortened the time period between when game wardens and the general public can remove crab traps although it still will be conducted over two weekends to allow the public to assist in this activity. **P. Campbell** reported that Hal Osburn retired effective August 31, 2003. Hal is currently retiring in New Mexico with his wife. The Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) adopted changes in hunting and fishing regulations. In an action aimed at enhancing fishing in Texas without restricting angling opportunity, the TPW Commission adopted a rule change that establishes a daily bag "boat limit" on guided trips. The new regulation affects "for hire" guided fishing trips only and establishes the daily bag limit for all species based on the number of customers onboard. A guide can still catch fish and retain his catch, but the overall bag limit for his vessel cannot exceed the combined bag limits of the customers. The regulation changes take effect September 1. A companion change to the boat limit restriction designed to bolster spotted seatrout fishing will cap the maximum length limit at 25 inches, with anglers allowed to retain only one trout longer than 25 inches per day. In passing the rule change, commissioners recognized the differences in habitat conditions among various bay ecosystems and directed agency staff to explore opportunities for regionalized management of coastal fisheries. The last alteration to spotted seatrout regulations occurred in 1990 when the minimum size limit was increased from 14 to 15 inches. Since then, the angling population along the Texas coast has increased by 19 percent and the number of fishing guides has grown by 300% since the early 1980s. In addition, the Commission approved an increase in the guide permit fees. For guides working in both salt and freshwater, the fee is \$200. The fee for guides working only in freshwater is \$125. Fishing guides working in salt water will also be required to possess a U.S. Coast Guard proficiency certification as a for-hire captain. From August 29, 2003 to August 31, 2004 TPWD officials will waive license requirements inside park boundaries at more than 70 state parks. TPWD completed another year of its Gulf charter boat survey. Texas

will continue to survey the Gulf charter boat fleet until December of 2004. Texas will also continue with biological sampling for another year. TPWD has submitted all of the 2002 age data except for ten Gulf flounder and the extra fish lengths. On September 9, a Travis County District Court Judge ruled in TPWD's favor and dismissed the last remaining count in a lawsuit brought by bay shrimpers about shrimping regulations adopted by the TPWD Commission in 2000. The shrimpers sued about rules pertaining to shortening the fall shrimping season by 15 days, expanding nursery and bait bay areas and the requirement to install a bycatch reduction device in shrimp nets. The court had thrown out the other counts in the suit in December 2002. A lawsuit by the Texas Shrimp Association about these regulations is pending. Another agency's staff reported possible red tide in San Antonio Bay in late September. Red water was seen in the area with only a few dead fish observed.

Florida - **J. O'Hop** reported the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) Florida Marine Research Institute (FMRI) conducts applied marine research in Florida's estuarine and nearshore environments. They have active programs in many areas of marine research, including red tide research and monitoring, seagrass research and restoration projects, fisheries research and monitoring, marine turtles and marine mammal research and monitoring, environmental assessment and monitoring projects, and support functions including a research library, specimen collections, and computer systems. The Fisheries Dependent Monitoring (FDM) group is assigned the tasks of the collection and analyses of commercial marine fisheries trip tickets, collection of information on saltwater fishing in Florida associated with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Marine Recreational Fishery Statistics Survey (MRFSS), collection of angler catch and effort information and samples (fin clips) of red drum for Project Tampa Bay (an experimental assessment of stock enhancement releases and techniques), collection of log books and sampling of catches from head boats, and collection of biological samples from recreational anglers and commercial fishermen through the Fisheries Information Network (FIN), Trip Interview Program (TIP), and NMFS Beaufort Head Boat Survey. The collection and processing of marine fisheries trip tickets is operating normally. Florida is currently editing trip tickets that were received during August and September, data entry is completing entry of the last of data received in September from dealers, and Florida is working on mail received during October. One of the clerical staff who was with the trip ticket program since its early operation (Ms. Ruby Johnson) retired at the end of June, and Florida hired Ms. Catalina Brown to replace her. Catalina is trilingual (English, Spanish, and German), and her language skills will help better communicate with dealers and fishermen especially in south Florida. Florida is currently preparing a mailing of information, scheduled for early November, to Florida Saltwater Products License holders of their reported commercial landings during 2002 and the first half of 2003. Florida hopes to receive feedback from these fishermen to improve the quality of the dealer-reported information. Some recent uses of trip ticket data were to support the federal rock shrimp permit qualifications and for disaster relief for shrimpers. In both of these instances, data which were not previously reported or which were incorrectly reported to the FWC came to light. Florida worked with fishermen and dealers to incorporate revised information for which documentation could be obtained into the Florida databases. Problems with data reporting and also with licensing of fishermen either as individuals, vessels, or corporations were manifested in several instances, and Florida is seeking solutions within the agency to resolve them. Clearly, in this age of increasing focus on fisheries and management of fishing effort, solutions need to be found to ensure that information regarding fishermen's participation and catch in fisheries can be readily obtained and associated through time to form



the basis for management plans and permits which may be used to regulate fishing effort and catch. Another aspect of the management of these data important to the historical documentation of fisheries information is record retention policy. It is typical to retain 3 years of financial records for audit purposes, and criminal investigations may include data six or more years old. Interestingly, some fisheries management plans were including data back to 1993 and perhaps older, depending upon circumstances. Under some conditions, it is necessary to refer back to hand-written license applications and trip tickets to resolve some issues, and several instances of attempted fraud have been revealed through the use of these stored records. Without access to the originally submitted documents or digital images of them, it may be hard to discern valid from fraudulent claims for participation and levels of catches in fisheries. In light of the experience with state and federal fishery permit qualification and allocation calculations, and after two disaster relief programs where trip ticket data were used as a basis for calculating at least some of the levels of funds available to individuals and corporations, it seems prudent to recommend storage of original documents (license and permit applications, trip tickets, log books, etc.) for 8 to 10 years to handle most of the common demands for document searches. This recommendation has serious implications for proper storage and retrieval of documents (either as original or in digitally scanned form). Angler catch and effort data collected by FDM staff for the MRFSS and Project Tampa Bay projects is proceeding normally. The number of interviews collected during similar periods in 2002 and 2003 are roughly equal. Bad weather in 2003 has reduced our ability to obtain interviews, measurements, and samples. Florida added significantly more sampling effort in July and August (Wave 4) on the Gulf Coast, and coldwater upwelling on the Atlantic Coast has made obtaining sufficient interviews troublesome in Wave 4 and particularly in Wave 5 (September-October). Interviews of red drum anglers for Project Tampa Bay have also declined during the early part of 2003 probably as a response to cooler-than-normal temperatures. Not all of the fin clips from angler-caught red drum have been analyzed, and five hatchery-reared fish have been identified from anglers' catches in Tampa Bay. Some aspects of Project Tampa Bay will likely end after this fiscal year, but we anticipate continuing the angler interview portion for at least another year. Commercial catch and effort data collect for the TIP by the state port samplers is proceeding normally. Florida has hired a new biologist (Vanessa Maxwell) in the Marathon Lab. The port samplers are also involved in biological sampling of commercial and recreational catches, and provide otoliths and tissue samples of many species. It is expected that some of the biologists to be involved in at-sea sampling on shrimp vessels in the Jacksonville area to examine white shrimp catches for seatrout and weakfish during the winter season. The head boat project is also functioning normally despite some turnover in staff. Staff at the Tequesta Lab provided coverage for the logbook program during the vacancy, and Florida hired a replacement for the sampler. Florida expects some limited at-sea sampling on head boats to help develop sampling protocols and to collect tissue samples of selected fish species of different sizes for the NMFS Pascagoula Laboratory Synoptic Survey for Mercury. All but four of the field samplers met in St. Petersburg during October 7-8, 2003, for a review of sampling procedures and training in fish identification. Tony Lowery presented an overview of his synoptic survey of mercury levels of several species of fish in the Gulf of Mexico, which is attempting to contrast mercury levels in fish collected near oil and gas platforms with fish collected over other areas. Kristin Maki (FMRI, Fish Biology) presented an update of her project on wahoo on the Atlantic Coast of Florida and the Bahamas. The fish identification training was conducted with over 80 species of fish for the samplers to examine and key. The test questions were a mix of specimens for fish identification and questions regarding fish morphology that will be used as a "pre-test" to assess achievement

levels. FMRI's Fisheries Assessment Section is designing a mini-course in Ichthyology to aid in the training of new biological staff and as a refresher course for existing staff members. The first part of the mini-course is scheduled for mid-January, 2004, and will focus on basic Ichthyology topics including fish morphology and identification. Other parts of the mini-course will focus on particular groups of families and species to help improve identification skills and ecological knowledge. And the implementation of biological tissue sampling is proceeding very well this year. Florida has put much more sampling effort into obtaining red snapper, king mackerel, and greater amberjack samples. However, they have yet to figure out how to obtain more samples of gulf and southern flounders. Through mid-September, Florida obtained otoliths from 8,855 specimens and spines from 65 gray triggerfish, 1,699 tissue samples for total mercury assays, and 1,078 tissue samples for DNA analyses (including 505 fin clips from red drum for the Tampa Bay Red Drum Project). Additional length measurements and sex determinations were made on most of the 9,849 specimens (from 79 species of fish) sampled. Florida expects to add significantly to the total number of specimens sampled through the end of this year.

Alabama - **K. Anson** reported that Alabama's seafood reporting regulation was amended and took effect in August. The amended regulation had two major changes. First, it split the reporting responsibilities between the fisherman and the dealer. The fisherman now is required to report items such as gear used, fishing time, trip time, area fished, etc. and the dealer reports species purchased pounds, value, condition, etc. The second change to the regulation required dealers to complete a trip ticket within seventy-two hours and provide a copy of the trip ticket to the fisherman upon request. Approximately 12 dealers are on electronic reporting and others in the near future. In FY2004, sale of commercial licenses were removed from every county court house, and approximately 10 bonded private businesses. Licenses will now be sold in Marine Resources Division (MRD) offices at Gulf Shores and Dauphin Island and the Bayou La Batre City Hall. This was done to streamline data flow for enforcement purposes and trip ticket fisherman/dealer license verification. This change was also done to prepare for future implementation of a unique ID numbering system for fishermen and dealers. Through September 2003, MRD staff collected over 2,800 otoliths and 1,900 additional lengths for the five target species. Flounder and red snapper otolith collection in Private/Rental mode continues to be problematic. Red snapper processing is one month behind the collection. So far, the number of otoliths collected from recreationally caught southern flounder is 62% less than last year. This was due in part to coastal Alabama experiencing its second wettest June on record. The TIP program continues as an ongoing data collection activity. Through September the two state port agents for Alabama have conducted 166 TIP interviews and measured nearly 10,000 fish representing 42 species. Bycatch data from gillnet and long-line fisheries have also been collected.

Through wave 4 of this year Alabama MRFSS samplers have collected 1,760 interviews, which is 16% over the aggregate quota for all modes. Samplers have identified 59 species of fish and measured and/or weighed over 4,700 fish. Cooperation in the Vessel Directory Telephone Survey by charter boat and guide captains continues to be nearly 100%. Participation in the pilot head boat telephone survey is also very high. The MRD, with assistance from local road building contractors, constructed nine new offshore artificial reefs in the federal reef zones. MRD also constructed four new inshore reefs and placed limestone material around three

existing gas platforms in lower Mobile Bay. MRD has plans to permit 10-12 reefs in the coming year in Mobile Bay and Perdido Bay.

Mississippi - **K. Cuevas** reported that there were 2 barges, 60 armored personnel carriers and approximately 5000 cubic yards of concrete rubble deployed in permitted offshore artificial reef areas. The Artificial Reef Program worked with the Derelict Vessel Program to deploy three derelict vessels in permitted reef sites. Approximately 160 nautical miles of habitat mapping was obtained using side scan data within the past 4 months. Also, the Finfish Bureau used side scan sonar to locate a stolen vehicle in the Pascagoula River. Gill/trammel net license holders were added to the trip ticket program, which now brings oyster, bait shrimp, hook and line commercial finfish to the trip ticket program. There have been 19 conventional and 7 fly fishing state records broken. Mississippi shrimp season opened June 10, and the summer shrimp landing were 6,392,000 pounds (May-August). From May 27 through June 20 the Shrimp and Crab Bureau interviewed 342 applicants for the federal fisheries disaster relief fund. There were 316 commercial shrimpers, 21 deckhands and 5 related business that qualified for disaster funds. The Shrimp and Crab Bureau received "Keep Mississippi Beautiful Award" from Keep America Beautiful and People Against Litter, and the A Gulf Guardian Award in the government category from the Gulf of Mexico Program for the Derelict Crab Trap Removal Program. The oyster season closed on May 24. There were 391,635 sacks of oysters harvested for the 2002-2003 season. There was an oyster relay season for 15 days starting May 30 to allow the moving of oysters from certain restricted waters to private lease areas. The Shellfish Program conducted a spring shell plant of 90 acres in the western Mississippi Sound. Currently that state is working with Jackson State University and Veridian Systems Inc. on a computerized trip ticket and oyster tag program for the oyster check stations as well as an automated Oyster Management Program. The Seafood Regulatory Program conducted a total of 1,843 regulatory and technical assistance activities from March to August 2003. There were 5 new Certified Mississippi Seafood Dealers, reviewed and updated Mississippi Seafood Dealer's 2003 HACCP Plans and verification studies. Finished the water sampling, routine and follow-up inspections for the first Quarter 2003 and on-going routine, follow-up and re-certification inspections for MS permitted Oyster and Crab dealers. The sanitation inspections and re-certification inspections for permitted Mississippi shrimp dealers are ongoing.

Louisiana - **J. Shepard** reported that the trip ticket forms for September have been received and scanned into the system. Louisiana is in the process of running the error-checking program on the data as well as clearing up some problems with August data. Louisiana has incorporated a more extensive error-checking routine for the vessel information. Louisiana has prepared the 2002 trip ticket data ready for delivery into the FIN Data Management System (DMS). There have been some problems but with the return of Mike Sestak, it appears the problems have been fixed and the DMS is ready to use again. Louisiana is also working with NMFS to provide the federal port agents with access to the trip ticket data for their review and provide corrections. Louisiana utilized the trip ticket data to allot the shrimp disaster funds. There were approximately 5,800 fishermen that qualified for these funds. This was a good test since it should compare what the dealers reported versus what the fishermen actually caught. In most cases, the data appeared to be accurate. There were three legitimate appeals where dealers may not have reported everything that was landed by the fishermen. M. Kasprzak reported Louisiana continues to exceed the targets for the MRFSS in all waves. Fishermen have been cooperative and providing good information. Under the biological sampling, Louisiana has been slightly

more successful in collecting red snapper otoliths this year. Southern flounder collections are a little low due to poor fishing conditions. Louisiana is up-to-date through August in the analysis of these otoliths and staff has begun the analysis of otoliths collected in September.

GMFMC - **R. Leard** reported that the Southeast Data Assessment and Review (SEDAR) process is a new method adopted by the Gulf Council to conduct stock assessments. Prior to this process, NMFS or the states would generate a stock assessment for a particular species and the Council stock assessment panels would review those assessments. There are three components to SEDAR: 1) data workshop; 2) assessment workshop, 3) review workshop. These workshops would include various Council panel members as well as personnel from the NMFS, states, Commissions to provide more peer review of the assessment. The South Atlantic Council has hired John Carmichael to coordinate this activity. A SEDAR process of yellowtail snapper has just been completed and there are several workshops for king mackerel and red snapper scheduled in late 2003/early 2004. In addition, scamp and greater amberjack will be reviewed in late 2004/early 2005 under this process. The Council has recently completed a regulatory amendment to implement status criteria benchmarks for Gulf group and Spanish mackerel and cobia. This amendment is currently under review by NMFS. The Council submitted an amendment to NMFS to extend the two closed areas (Madison Swanson and Steamboat Lumps) off Florida for another 6 years. These areas have been closed to all fishing except highly migratory activities. Under the amendment, these areas would be open to fishing for highly migratory as well as coastal migratory species from May through October. The rest of the year, the areas would be completely closed to all fishing. The Council is very involved in developing a red snapper rebuilding plan as well as a regulatory amendment to reduce morality on vermilion snapper. NMFS is also working on a revised secretarial amendment 1 for red grouper. The Council's EFH environmental impact statement (EIS) is under review through November 29 and then will begin the finalization phase of the EIS. The Council is also working on a scoping document that will not allow aquaculture permits as well as two options papers about shrimp - 1) establishing status criteria benchmarks and improve the standardized bycatch reporting methods; and 2) examining various methods for reducing the number of vessels operating in the shrimp fishery.

NMFS - **G. Davenport** reported the NMFS port agents continue to collect data regarding Gulf shrimp activities from the west coast of Florida to Texas. In addition, these samplers are involved in the Trip Interview Program (TIP), which targets most of the federally managed species. The cooperation between the NMFS samplers and the state samplers continues to improve under this activity. NMFS continues its quota monitoring activities for mackerels, shallow-water groupers, and red snapper in the Gulf. NMFS is compiling information for the upcoming SEDAR process regarding operating units (number of vessels) within the various fisheries. NMFS is involved in a project that identifies fishing communities. There will be a training session for TIP online at the upcoming Gulf of Mexico port samplers meeting in Miami. As the system becomes operational, NMFS will be moving away from the PC version of the program. In addition, a presentation regarding gonadal development will be discussed at this meeting. NMFS continues to review trip ticket data from Florida and Louisiana programs. There is an online, web-based program to assist in this review. NMFS will be working on expanding the number of shrimp interviews that are obtained for the detailed effort activities. NMFS will be incorporating the help of state personnel in an effort to increase the number of interviews for this information. One of the NMFS agents is of Vietnamese heritage and she has

assisted in reviewing the translations for the new TED regulations. She provides local terminology to make it easier for Vietnamese fishermen to understand the rules and regulations.

**GSMFC - D. Donaldson** reported that the recreational operations continue to run smoothly. The states are still exceeding quota on routine basis. In 2004, Alabama will begin to collect data from their head boat to begin testing the at-sea sampling methods. A wave meeting is scheduled for October 21-22 and the group will discuss various issues including the use of data loggers to collect recreational data in Mississippi. The commercial aspects of FIN (trip tickets) are also operating quite well. One component of the trip ticket program is the electronic reporting of the data. To date, Southwest Computer Bureau, Inc. (SCBI) has installed almost 170 including 68 in Louisiana, 16 in Alabama and 85 in Florida. In 2004, Louisiana will begin collecting detailed effort for blue crab fishery to test the sampling methodology. This activity could potentially be expanded to other fisheries/states in future, contingent on additional funds. He noted that biological sampling continues in the five Gulf States and the status of this sampling will be discussed later in this meeting. The FIN Data Manager, Mike Sestak is back in the office. M. Sestak will be working on various issues including loading biological data into the system and compiling registration tracking data and putting that into system. Although he discussed some new projects for 2004, unfortunately, these projects will not be conducted since NMFS will be taking a 5% "tax" from the GulfFIN line item and FIN needs to cut approximately \$170K from the existing budget.

#### **Election of Chairman**

After some discussion, Page Campbell was elected Chairman and Kevin Anson was elected Vice Chairman.

#### **Other Business**

**D. Donaldson** stated that C. Denson asked this Subcommittee to discuss an issue related to trip time versus soak time in the crab fishery. There appears to be some confusion among fishermen and dealers regarding trip time and fishing (soak) time. In Florida, both trip time and soak time are collected on the trip tickets. In Louisiana, the information collected on the trip ticket is trip time only.

*Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:05 p.m.*

**TCC CRAB SUBCOMMITTEE  
MINUTES - 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
Monday, October 13, 2003  
Corpus Christi, Texas**

**APPROVED BY:**  
Tom Wagner 7 April 2004  
**COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN**

Subcommittee Chairman Tom Wagner (Texas) called the meeting to order at 1:07 p.m. The following were in attendance:

**Members Present**

Traci Floyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Susan Gerhart, FWC/FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL (*Proxy for A. McMillen-Jackson*)  
Vince Guillory, LDWF, Bourg, LA  
Tom Wagner, TPWD, Rockport, TX

**Members Absent**

Leslie Hartman, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL  
Anne McMillen-Jackson, FWS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Harriet Perry, USM/CMS/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS

**Staff**

Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jeff Rester, Habitat/SEAMAP Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Cindy Yocom, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Walter Blessey, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Biloxi, MS  
Paul Cook, LDWF, New Iberia, LA  
Art Morris, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX  
Virginia Vail, *GSMFC Commissioner*, FWC, Tallahassee, FL  
John P. O'Connell, Texas Sea Grant, Port Lavaca, TX  
Ralph Rayburn, Texas Sea Grant, College Station, TX  
Glen Sutton, TPWD, Dickinson, TX

**Agenda**

**S. VanderKooy** requested that item #4, Community Based Restoration Project, be moved to the end of the agenda. **T. Floyd** moved to do so, and **V. Guillory** seconded the motion which passed by consensus.

**Minutes**

The group reviewed the minutes from meeting held March 17, 2003, in Point Clear, Alabama. **V. Guillory** moved to adopt as written. **T. Floyd** seconded the motion, and the minutes were approved as presented.

## **Upcoming Derelict Trap Cleanups**

**Mississippi** - **T. Floyd** reported that more than 4,330 derelict traps have been collected and recycled to date. Approximately 450 more traps were recycled since the winter closed season and volunteer effort in January. The next derelict trap cleanup in Mississippi is scheduled for March 14-31, 2004. Department staff proposes: 1) a one week closure in each of the three coastal counties requiring crabbers in those areas to move traps outside of ½ mile of the shoreline for a shallow water trap cleanup; and 2) require that crab traps are within a ½ mile of the shoreline for the opening week of shrimp season to clean up deep water traps with the help of shrimpers. The Mississippi Crab Task Force will meet November 4 to work out the details.

**Texas** - **A. Morris** reported that 3,858 abandoned crab traps were picked up by volunteers, coastal fisheries staff, and game wardens. A total of 494 volunteers assisted and 152 vessels were used. The area where the most traps were picked up was San Antonio Bay where 1,558 were recovered. There were 159 volunteers working in the Bay area. Proposed Senate Bill 607 would remove the seven-day grace period during the closed season thus allowing traps to be removed beginning on the first day of the closed season. The next derelict trap cleanup in Texas is scheduled for February 20-29, 2004.

**Louisiana** - The new Louisiana abandoned crab trap removal program has received considerable publicity in recent months. Support for the abandoned crab trap removal program has been enthusiastic and broad-based. **V. Guillory** reported that Act 48 (R.S. 56:332) of the 2003 Regular Legislative Session gave the Louisiana Wildlife & Fisheries Commission the authority to establish a program for the removal of abandoned crab traps. This legislation was sponsored by the LDWF. The Act specifies that the LWFC designates the following: 1) the beginning and ending dates of the trap closure; 2) the geographical area of the trap closure; 3) who may remove the abandoned traps; 4) the locations where the removed abandoned traps are to be placed for disposal. Two time windows were provided for the closures: 1) up to a 16 consecutive-day period between February 1 and March 31; and 2) up to a 14 consecutive-day period which includes the opening of the spring inshore shrimp season.

For the winter closure, the use of crab traps will be prohibited for a 16-day period from 6:00 a.m., February 28, 2004 through 6:00 a.m., March 14, 2004, within the upper Terrebonne/Timbalier Bay estuary in Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes. For the spring closure, the use of crab traps will be prohibited in a portion of Vermilion Bay for a 14-day period beginning at 6:00 a.m. five days prior to the opening of the 2004 spring inshore shrimp season in Vermilion Bay and ending at 6:00 a.m. nine days following the opening of the 2004 spring inshore shrimp season in Vermilion Bay. In the event that the LWFC approves opening the 2004 spring inshore shrimp season in Vermilion Bay before a five-day minimum notice can be provided for the crab trap closure, then the use of crab traps shall be prohibited for a nine-day period beginning at 6:00 a.m. on the opening day of the 2004 spring inshore shrimp season in Vermilion Bay and ending at 6:00 a.m. nine days following the opening of the season.

All crab traps remaining in the closed area during the specified period will be considered abandoned. The abandoned traps may be removed by anyone, must be brought to designated sites, and may not be possessed outside of the closed area. However, unserviceable traps may be possessed by shrimp fishermen outside of the closed area when in compliance with R.S. 56:332. This regulation stipulates: 1) unserviceable crab traps caught incidentally in shrimp gear must be returned to shore



for proper disposal; 2) serviceable crab traps caught incidentally in shrimp gear must be returned to the water with a "common" (one-gallon or larger bleach bottles) float attached; and, 3) a serviceable crab trap is defined as any crab trap of legal construction and capable of harvesting blue crabs.

Several Subcommittee members and staff have expressed interest in helping during the first Louisiana cleanup. **V. Guillory** welcomed the assistance and stated that lodging would be available at the Point Aux Chene refuge.

Florida - **S. Gerhart** reported that the FWC approved a trap debris and derelict trap rule that went into effect July 1, 2003. This rule allows for retrieval from shorelines of debris and traps by private and public groups as part of coastal cleanup events, and expands the funded trap retrieval program to allow volunteer collection (stone crab and lobster). In the past, only law enforcement agents were allowed to retrieve derelict traps; the rule increases the ability for others to assist in the cleanup, with Commission authorization.

On September 20, 2003, in conjunction with the Annual Ocean Conservancy Coastal Cleanup, an effort to clean up derelict traps was undertaken in the St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge. Only one trap was found, but a data card was developed that can now be used in future events. On October 7, 2003, another cleanup in the refuge recovered 113 derelict blue crab traps from a bay area. A cleanup event in the Keys is being planned for March 2004.

### **State Reports**

Florida - **S. Gerhart** reported total hard crab landings in 2002 were 5.4% higher than landings for 2001; however, Gulf landings increased (20.7%), while Atlantic and inland landings decreased (16.6% and 36.6%, respectively). All values are still below the long-term average of approximately 15 million pounds. Through July 2003, 4,315,939 pounds of blue crabs have been landed. This is slightly more than in 2001 or 2002, but much below the levels seen in the first half of previous years. In 2002, July levels were lower than those of 2001, but year-end totals were higher than those of 2001.

A blue crab trapping study is presently being conducted at five sites within upper Tampa Bay; four of these sites are locations used by Steele and Bert (1994). This study was initiated in April 2002 and scheduled to continue through January 2005; future sampling is contingent on further grant support. Traps are serviced weekly, and data are collected on crab abundance, bycatch composition and abundance, and site temperature and salinity, as well as biological data for each crab captured. The data collected for each crab includes size (carapace width), weight, gender, maturity, and observable disease state, if relevant. Preliminary data indicates that 2003 will show a higher catch rate than 2002.

A Blue Crab Advisory Board was established during summer 2003 by the Florida FWC. The Board, which is composed of 15 blue crab fishermen/dealers from throughout the state, was assembled as a first step in the development of a blue crab fishery management plan for the state. The first meeting was held in September where the role of the Board was reviewed, the purpose of the plan was discussed, and trends in the industry were determined. Strategic goals and objectives were to be developed. Two to three additional meetings will be held to develop a consensus document of goals and objectives. If accepted by the FWC, regional workshops will be held and include the



Board. A Board meeting will be held to review a draft rule in March, the rule will be reviewed by the Commission in April, and regional workshops (ten) will be held for public input. The FWC hopes to complete the process and have a rule accepted by December 2004.

Staff from the FMRI Crustacean Fisheries work group conducted a mail survey of licensed commercial fishermen with blue crab endorsements who reported blue crab landings in Florida in 2001. The principal goal of the survey was to gather information on some of the technical aspects of commercial fishing for blue crabs in Florida, such as trap usage and loss, and fishing effort and location. As an ancillary benefit, through the identification of intensely fished areas, efficient trap cleanup programs could be conducted and potential user-conflicts with other competing fisheries (e.g., shrimp fishery) could be identified. A preliminary draft has indicated:

- Fishermen fished an average of 364 traps total.
- Actively fishing an average of 193 traps in a day.
- Approximately 67% reported that they fished their blue crab traps alone and 27% fished with one other person.
- About 80% fished three to six days per week and less than 65% fished forty or more weeks per year.
- Approximately 36% of their traps were lost annually.
- About 15% replaced broken, lost, or stolen traps immediately and about 60% replaced the traps within one week.
- Theft and loss of buoy/cut line were perceived as being of the greatest importance in the loss of traps, and bad weather was regarded as the least important.

An effort is being made in Florida to identify horseshoe crab spawning beaches. Spawning behavior of horseshoe crabs is best observed within a few days before and after a full or new moon on sandy beaches with low wave action. If any of the other states know of spawning areas, please send the information in. Specific information being gathered includes:

- date and time of sighting
- location of sighting
- whether or not the horseshoe crabs were spawning
- rough estimates of the number of horseshoe crabs seen.

Alabama - L. Hartman was vacationing; however, she provided a written report. Blue crab landings were below average from January through July; in August the landings exceeded the monthly mean. Monthly values mirrored pounds landed. Record rain falls caused the mean salinity of Mobile Bay and Mississippi Sound to drop significantly and may be responsible for the below average landings. Landings have not been adjusted for effort. License holders remain steady at approximately 170 licensed crab fishermen. Due to disinterest, the deepwater portion of the derelict trap removal program will not be conducted in 2004. Alabama's shallow-water derelict crab trap removal program is scheduled for Saturday, March 13, 2004. Stu Kennedy with the Gulf Council contacted the Department recently about a rumor that approximately 60,000 to 70,000 pounds of red crabs being landed in the Bayou "recently." Currently, no red crabs have been noted in trip ticket data. The situation is being monitored.

Mississippi - **T. Floyd** reported 2002 landings were closer to 2000 levels at more than 700,000 pounds. As of August 2003, landings were 655,000 pounds. There has been little difference in license sales from 2001-02 and 2002-03. Mississippi has 250 commercial licensed fishermen and 700 recreationally-licensed fishermen. Beginning March 1, 2003, crab trap buoys must be attached by non-floating or weighted float line. This requirement will help prevent trap lines being clipped by boat propellers and contributing to the problem of lost traps. Effective January 1, 2004, a permanent stainless steel, aluminum, or plastic trap tag identifying the licensed fisherman must be attached to all crab traps. The trap tags must be legibly and permanently stamped with letters containing the applicable licensed crab fisherman's full name. The minimum height of the letters must be 3/16". The tags must be supplied by the fisherman. Mandated utilization of trap tags is being added to help facilitate law enforcement in cases of theft and to help fishermen identify their lost traps. Outreach is being focused toward fishermen and fishing supply shops to help them prepare for the tag law. New licensing categories are being prepared in order to determine the number of commercial crab trap fishermen versus trawl fishermen that sell their crab harvest. The current Mississippi licensing system groups these two gear types together. An S-K proposal has been submitted to locate deeper water derelict traps and piles of traps deposited by shrimp fishermen at navigational beacons. Currently, Mississippi has 17 licensed and permitted crab dealers. Of those, six actively process crabs. Four pick blue crabs, one pasteurizes blue crabs, and one is a Geryonid crab processor. There is a Geryonid fishery being conducted out of Mississippi.

Louisiana - **V. Guillory** reported that by July 2003, 25.6 million pounds of blue crabs had been landed. The fishermen and dealers have been reporting a bad season; however, the landings are in line with last year. Effort has increased over the last three to four years. Louisiana has submitted a proposal for additional TIP monitoring of the crab fishery to include the number of traps and length/weight measurements.

Two bills were introduced by the crab task force. One, which passed, would add March to the time period when escape rings must remain open. March is generally the worst time of year to catch undersized crabs. They also introduced a bill to allow commercial crab trap fishermen to retain fish bycatch. This would allow the fishermen to retain up to 25 fish caught in crab traps per day for personal consumption (e.g., flounder, cat fish, sheepshead, black drum). Spotted seatrout, red drum, and freshwater game fish cannot be retained. After the bill was introduced, an amendment was attached which also further defined a crab trap. There was some concern about fishermen using crab traps as fish traps. Senate Bill 1067 designated a commercial fisherman as certified if he or she made 50% of their income from fisheries.

Texas - **T. Wagner** reported preliminary landings at 1.5 - 2 million pounds of crabs landed in Texas. In 2002, landings in Texas were just more than seven million pounds, the highest since 1997. Price per pound was also the highest since 1981. Price per pound for crabs in 2001 was \$.76 per pound which is up \$.05 from 2000 and easily the highest value over that 20-year period. Central Texas crab fishermen are reporting a good year and cite the beneficial rains over the last two years. No major legislation occurred other than the change to the seven-day grace period during the derelict crab trap cleanup. The number of commercial crab licenses sold has declined from 1999 through 2002. The number sold are as follows: 302 in 1999, 277 in 2000, 255 in 2001, and 230 in 2002. The buyback program continued, and the Commission will purchase back six licenses in 2003 at an average cost of \$5,000. A study on alternative degradable panels was performed. Results concluded that bailing

## **Community Based Restoration Project**

**J. Rester** confirmed that the Community Based Restoration Project was funded at \$192,500. Each state should submit a report of their six month activities by January 15, 2004. He will send an E-mail reminder. Tom Moore would like to participate in a cleanup event so that the program will be acknowledged. **V. Guillory** noted that the first Louisiana cleanup would be a good forum for his participation. Refer to <http://www.blue-crab.net/derelect.html>.

Cleanups are scheduled as follows:

- February 20-29, 2004 – Texas (media event March 21, 2004)
- February 28-March 14, 2004 – Louisiana
- March 13, 2004 – Alabama
- March 14-April 3, 2004 – Mississippi

## **Election of Chairman**

**V. Guillory** moved to reelect **T. Wagner** as Chairman. **T. Floyd** seconded the motion which passed unanimously. **T. Wagner** noted that he may have a problem with out of state travel but will work to fulfill his duties as Chairman.

## **Other Business**

**S. VanderKooy** reported that Ali Hudson, NOAA Fisheries, is confident that the Gulf blue crab fishery would remain a Category III and not be elevated to a Category II. As long as NOAA sees movement on the outreach efforts, the agency will consider it a good-faith effort being exercised in the outreach to the fishery.

**T. Wagner** requested that all ongoing efforts be added to the *Guidelines* document. He also requested that NOAA be kept informed of regulatory changes that will impact the fishery (e.g., non-floating or weighted lines). NOAA should be kept informed of the positive approach being taken by the states to reduce the possibility of mammal interactions within the crab trap fishery.

*There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:10 p.m.*

**TCC HABITAT SUBCOMMITTEE  
MINUTES - 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
Monday, October 13, 2003  
Corpus Christi, Texas**

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Chairman Mark LaSalle called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. and asked members and guests to introduce themselves. The following members and others were present:

**Members**

Frank Courtney, FFWCC, Port Manatee, FL  
Kevin Madley, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Steve Heath, ADCNR, Dauphin Island, AL  
Bob Spain, TPWD, Austin, TX  
Robert Adami, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX  
Jan Boyd, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Mark LaSalle, MSU Coastal Research and Extension Center, Biloxi, MS  
Heather Finley, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Paul Cook, LDWF, New Iberia, LA  
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS

**Staff**

Jeff Rester, Habitat/SEAMAP Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Cheryl Noble, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Bill Walker, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Pamela Baker, Environmental Defense, Corpus Christi, TX

**Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was adopted without changes.

**Adoption of Minutes**

The minutes of the March 17, 2003 meeting were adopted as written.

**Administrative Report**

**J. Rester** stated that the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council has completed their Essential Fish Habitat Environmental Impact Statement. The draft EFH EIS went out for public review at the end of August and is out for public comment until November 29, 2003. **J. Rester** stated that the designation of EFH for each species is less inclusive than it was originally. Several measures to reduce the impacts of fishing on habitat were examined and the Council designated the Flower Gardens National Marine Sanctuary, the Florida Middle Grounds, the Tortugas Ecological Reserves,

Pulley's Ridge, and the Madison-Swanson marine reserve area as habitat areas of particular concern. **J. Rester** reported that "The Annotated Bibliography of Fishing Impacts on Habitat" was recently updated for the third time. The update contains 52 new citations for papers dealing with the impact of fishing on habitat. The entire database now contains 725 citations. **J. Rester** stated that NOAA's Community Based Restoration Program funded the Commission's Derelict Trap Task Force's proposal to remove derelict traps in the Gulf of Mexico. Funding in the amount of \$192,500 was provided to the states and Commission to remove traps. Trap removals in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama are planned for next spring and summer. **J. Rester** reported that a rapid assessment survey of Mobile Bay took place September 2-5, 2003. The purpose of the survey was to establish a baseline of species and distributions inhabiting the Bay in order to be able to detect non-native species in later surveys as well as to reveal any non-native species already inhabiting the Bay. The project was planned and implemented by the Alabama-Mississippi Rapid Assessment Team. It is a partnership among a number of agencies and organizations, including the University of Southern Mississippi Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources/Marine Resources Division, and the Dauphin Island Sea Lab. A number of other agencies assisted in the collection of specimens. Finally, **J. Rester** stated that the "Summary of Aquaculture Programs by State" document was completed and unless anyone objected, he would forward the document to the Technical Coordinating Committee for their review.

#### **Coastal Wetlands and Watersheds**

**M. LaSalle** stated that he wanted to share the watershed work he was involved with in Mississippi and the Southeast region. He stated that Mississippi started a state watershed program in 2001. In 1992, a grass roots organization called the South Mississippi Environmental and Agricultural Coordination Organization (SMEACO) was formed in coastal Mississippi. This organization is comprised of personnel from federal, state, and local agencies, and representatives from the private sector that have an interest in managing and protecting coastal resources. The major purpose of SMEACO is to foster stewardship of the environment and coastal resources within south Mississippi through environmental awareness and education. Recently SMEACO started promoting the idea of watersheds and educating people on watersheds and impacts to watersheds. **M. LaSalle** discussed the different types of wetlands found within watersheds and the functions and values of these habitats. He discussed direct and indirect impacts and the effects of these impacts. He also discussed ways for citizens to become involved. **M. LaSalle** stated that if interested, the regional watershed forum director would be happy to help anyone start an organization within their state.

#### **Review of the Council's Mariculture Policy**

**J. Rester** stated that the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) was currently developing a generic amendment to provide for regulation of offshore aquaculture of managed species. The Council felt that their current mariculture policy did not pertain to the offshore environment and requested that the Habitat Subcommittee update the document for their consideration. **J. Rester** stated that he had distributed suggested language changes to everyone before the meeting and that he would like the Subcommittee to review the new document. Several suggested changes were made to the document. Due to the Council wanting to review the policy at their November meeting, the Subcommittee agreed that the policy should be forwarded to the Council, but the Council should understand that the document was only in draft format. The

Subcommittee wanted the Council to know that they would be happy to revise the policy further if given more time.

### **Habitat Video Discussion**

**J. Rester** stated that he had discussed the habitat video with several agencies (NMFS Habitat Conservation, USFWS, Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, and the Gulf of Mexico Program) and all seemed interested in the idea of the proposed video. He stated that he also discussed the project with a videographer that had worked with the Gulf of Mexico Program on similar videos. The videographer confirmed that it would cost approximately \$50,000 to produce the final 30-minute video. **J. Rester** stated that it would take several funding agencies to contribute the funds needed to produce the video. He reported that in discussions with the Gulf of Mexico Program, they suggested he apply for funding from them. Pre-proposals needed to be submitted to them in January. He stated that he knew that many of the Subcommittee members interacted with the Gulf of Mexico Program and anything they could do to further the funding of the video from that agency would be greatly appreciated. **J. Rester** requested that each member try to locate possible funding sources and report back to him. He also stated that he would distribute the pre-proposal to everyone to review before it was submitted to the Gulf of Mexico Program. Subcommittee members suggested that he try to schedule a videographer for the next meeting so they could discuss the idea and concept of the video with them.

### **Future Habitat Subcommittee Projects**

**M. LaSalle** wanted to know if anyone on the Subcommittee had any projects that they would like the Subcommittee to work on as a group of experts from around the Gulf of Mexico. He stated that he would like the group to be more proactive instead of just reactive. **B. Walker** stated that he would like to discuss the role the Habitat Subcommittee could have in educating the public about important habitat issues. He was mainly concerned about educating city and county officials and board of supervisors about wetlands and sensitive habitats. He was interested in materials that could be developed and presented to these types of people at their meetings. He envisioned preexisting presentations that could easily be tailored as needed. **M. LaSalle** stated that this could be developed in conjunction with a web site that provided additional information on various topics along with frequently asked questions. **B. Walker** thought it would also be important to highlight success stories that incorporate measures to protect the environment. The example he used was several very nice golf courses in south Mississippi that work with the natural environment. **M. LaSalle** asked everyone to start gathering success stories and thinking about the topics to include on a web site.

### **Habitat Issues of Interest From Each State**

**S. Heath** stated that the offshore mariculture facility proposed off of Fort Morgan is still ongoing. The facility is located four miles offshore and is not within state waters, but the state agencies are still concerned about its impacts on surrounding habitat. **S. Heath** reported that the Dauphin Island Sea Lab along with the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program is undergoing the daunting task of determining coastal carrying capacity.

**K. Madley** reported that the University of South Florida has developed a water atlas that provides water quality data throughout Florida at one central web site. An offshoot of the web site has been

that volunteer rates have increased. The University is now working on a coastal version of the atlas. Another web site has been developed that allows users to outline an area and the site will display which agencies are in charge of regulations for the area. It also lists any research that is being conducted in the area.

**H. Finley** stated that Louisiana would hold its first derelict crab trap retrieval next year. Louisiana will hold a shallow water trap sweep in Terrebonne Parish and a deepwater removal in Vermilion Bay. She reported that deep-water port access is still an issue. The Port of West St. Mary has applied for permit to dredge the Intracoastal Canal for deep-water access. This project will tie in with the Port of Iberia's proposed deepening project. Other ports across the state are also looking to deepen their channels. Finally, **H. Finley** reported that the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for coastal restoration would soon be released.

**J. Boyd** stated that Mississippi Department of Health is mapping septic tanks in the coastal counties. He reported that DMR is currently developing a master plan for restoring Deer Island to its 1850 coastline. A recent marsh creation project has created approximately 50 acres from the beneficial use of dredged material from the Biloxi Ship Channel. **M. LaSalle** stated that a bioblitz has been planned for next year in the Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

**B. Spain** stated that Texas is still conducting derelict crab trap work. The artificial reef program has received new oil and gas platform donations. **B. Spain** also reported that legislation was recently passed that outlawed driving vehicles in dry riverbeds.

#### **Election of Chairman**

M. LaSalle was elected as chairman with D. Frugé serving as vice-chairman.

#### **Other Business**

With no other business, the meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

**TCC SEAMAP SUBCOMMITTEE  
MINUTES - 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
Tuesday, October 14, 2003  
Corpus Christi, Texas**

APPROVED BY:  
  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Chairman Jim Hanifen called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. The following members and others were present:

**Members**

Jim Hanifen, Chair, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Richard Waller, USM/CMS/GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
Paul Choucair, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Steve Heath, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Rick Leard, GMFMC, Tampa, FL  
Mark Leiby, FWC/FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Terry Henwood, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS

**Others**

Buck Sutter, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL  
Robert Adami, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX  
Domingo Sanches, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX  
Kevin Madley, FWC/FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL

**Staff**

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Cheryl Noble, Staff Assistant, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

**Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was adopted as submitted.

**Approval of Minutes**

**M. Leiby moved to approve the August 6, 2003 minutes as submitted. P. Choucair seconded the motion and the minutes were approved.**

**Administrative Report**

**J. Rester** reported the Fall Plankton Survey took place from August 19 through October 1, 2003. A total of 153 stations were completed by Alabama, NMFS, and Louisiana. Mississippi will be conducting winter plankton sampling this year starting in late November or early December because



they did not participate in the Fall Plankton Survey. **R. Waller** stated they had problems with the vessel and could not get out in that time frame.

**J. Rester** contacted the Data Coordinating Work Group and asked for their input on what an end of survey summary report for the Fall Shrimp/Groundfish Cruise should include. This report will replace the red snapper real time summary plots that SEAMAP has done in the past. He said only two people responded and one felt the total catch and top three species by weight or number should be displayed along with environmental information, and the other suggested to show as much information as possible only limiting the list if time constraints in analyzing and verifying the data would be a problem. The survey design and locations will also be in the report. The Subcommittee asked J. Rester to email them information on previous surveys of the top five species and they will then contact him with what information should be in the report.

**J. Rester** said M. McDuff has been contacted by most of the members with their GIS contact. He asked the Subcommittee if they have not contacted M. McDuff yet to please do so. **J. Rester** said he has not received the 2001 atlas information yet but hopes to have the draft to the Subcommittee before the end of the year.

#### **SEAMAP Funding for FY2004**

**J. Rester** asked S. Heath how much of the \$20,000 he will need to purchase the electronic measuring boards. **S. Heath** said they are in the process of submitting the paperwork and they will need \$15,000 to make the necessary purchases. **P. Choucair** said they could use the other \$5,000 to purchase a tablet PC. He said the environmentally sealed PC (military version) will cost \$5,000 but the other version that is non-environmentally sealed ranges from \$1,500-\$2,000 but Texas has put a freeze on computer purchases. **M. Leiby moved to have the Commission purchase the necessary computer hardware and software for Texas and if any funds are left, the Commission will receive that to be used for a GIS meeting.** **P. Choucair** suggested waiting until the end of the meeting to decide this motion because the funds may have to be used for something else. **J. Rester** stated a decision has to be made today because the cooperative agreements must be modified.

**J. Rester** reported that the Senate budget increased SEAMAP by \$350,000 but a final decision will not be made until it goes before the Committee. He said the Subcommittee needs to decide how to use the extra funding if it is received. The Subcommittee needs to have a plan to take to the South Atlantic and Caribbean components to justify the portion the Gulf asks for. **J. Rester** said with the current SEAMAP funding, the Gulf receives 46%. Each member informed the Subcommittee of their needs and what they would do with an increase. The Subcommittee also discussed priorities of the SEAMAP-Gulf. **J. Hanifen** suggested each member take this to their agency for their input, do a needs assessment, and also decide what the customers would like to see. He asked J. Rester to contact J. Carmichael and ask what information they will need for stock assessments. J. Rester will set up a conference call in four weeks and the Subcommittee will make a final decision on how extra funding will be used and how to present it to the other two components.

## **Coordinated Fishery Independent Data Collection Update**

**D. Donaldson** reported the South Atlantic Board has approved the revised goals and objectives and the concept of expansion of SEAMAP so they will now be moving forward. A conference call of the SEAMAP Chairmen, Coordinators and NMFS representative is scheduled for October 28<sup>th</sup> to discuss the next steps in the process. The group will then meet early next year. D. Donaldson will keep all involved apprized of developments.

## **ArcIMS and SEAMAP Database Development**

**J. Rester** asked the Subcommittee for suggestions for the new atlas format. He and P. Choucair have discussed several options using visual presentations. The Subcommittee agreed to change the format of the atlas by making it more graphical and not having the data tables. Future atlases will be distributed on CD-ROM and will consist of an Executive Summary, various GIS maps of the data, the raw data, and all SEAMAP reports for that year. J. Rester will also contact M. McDuff to discuss if any changes have to be made in how NMFS provides the data to develop the new format. J. Rester and P. Choucair will continue working on this and make a presentation to the Subcommittee at the next SEAMAP meeting.

**J. Rester** reported he attended a meeting in September with Peter Hoar from the National Coastal Data Development Center (NCDDC). The NCDDC has been trying to provide a gateway or access to SEAMAP data via an ArcIMS website. He reviewed with the Subcommittee the discussions that were held at the meeting and the different options that are available. After discussion, the Subcommittee decided the NCDDC Program will be good way to expose SEAMAP data to more users. J. Rester will discuss with P. Hoar about developing canned queries for the SEAMAP data for geographies, state statistical zones, time periods, species, etc., for the user to develop a map. A statement should be on the map that if more information is needed, contact the SEAMAP data manager. Links to the SEAMAP data manager, website and members should all be available on the website.

## **Election of Chairman**

**R. Waller** moved to elect **Jim Hanifen Chairman** and **Steve Heath Vice Chairman**. **M. Leiby** seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

## **Other Business**

**J. Hanifen** reminded the Subcommittee that the *Charles H. Lyles Award Luncheon* will be at 12:00 noon and there will be a reception on the U.S.S. Lexington at 5:30 p.m.

*There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 11:30 a.m.*

**COMMERCIAL/RECREATIONAL FISHERIES ADVISORY PANEL**  
**MINUTES - 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting**  
**Tuesday, October 14, 2003**  
**Corpus Christi, Texas**

*Philip Horn*  
*Grey Cane*

P. Horn called the meeting to order at 1:29 p.m. with the following in attendance:

**Members**

Philip Horn, Clark Seafood, Pascagoula, MS  
Randy Gros, Marrero, LA  
Bob Zales II, Orange Beach Charterboat Association, Panama City, FL  
Degraaf Adams, Richmond, TX

**Others**

Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
John O'Connell, Texas Sea Grant, Port Lavaca, TX  
Andrew Kemmerer, Brandon MS  
Billy Fuls, Corpus Christi, TX  
Walter Blessey, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Biloxi, MS  
Terry Henwood, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
William Walker, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Joe O'Hop, FFWCC/FMRI, St Petersburg, FL  
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Kevin Anson, ADCNR/AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
J.T. Jenkins, ADCNR/AMRD, Dauphin Island, AL  
Jeff Mayne, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Walter Chataginer, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Larry Young, TPWD, Austin, TX  
Joseph Shepard, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Bruce Buckson, FFWCC, Tallahassee, FL

**Staff**

Larry B. Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Cindy Yocom, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS  
David Donaldson, Data Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

**Introductions**

**P. Horn** welcomed everyone and reported that no quorum had been met for either the commercial or recreational sectors. Without a quorum the Panel met in a work session. It was again pointed out that the Texas commercial seat was still vacant.

### Adoption of Agenda

R. Gros moved to adopt the agenda as written, B. Zales seconded and the agenda was approved.

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

Approval of minutes were deferred until the next meeting.

### Discussion of Improving Recreational Data Review Process

D. Donaldson provided information regarding the recent discovery of an error in the recreational data which led to a 6% inflation of the recreational red snapper catch prior to its being identified and corrected. At issue was the process by which the MRFSS data is reviewed and errors like this are corrected. Donaldson explained how this particular mistake was missed and how changes are being made to reduce the possibility of having them occur in the future. B. Zales requested that the NMFS re-examine the MRFSS data back to 1996 before conducting the new assessment for red snapper. He also would like a recreational fishing member to be added to the wave meetings to help in this process. He acknowledged that the current system is much better than what they had before and that this is a problem with human error, not a flawed data program. Donaldson indicated that they would look into Zales suggestions.

### Trip Tickets

At the precious meeting of the CRFAP in March, there was considerable discussion regarding trip tickets in various states which staff and those in attendance could not answer. It was suggested that representatives from each state be invited to discuss their state's system and answer questions from the CRFAP. Therefore, each of the four states which have trip tickets presented how their program works, who reports, and when they must report.

J. Shepard made a short presentation on the Louisiana system and specifically discussed the who and when of reporting. K. Cuevas presented the Mississippi system as it stands today. Oyster reporting was the first fishery to require reporting in the new system. It was introduced in 1998 but has still not been enacted legislatively; therefore, it is not mandatory for finfish.

K. Anson discussed Alabama's trip ticket program which has been in place since 2000. The laws and regulations in Alabama need rewriting to clarify who is responsible and what gets reported. J. O'Hop presented Florida's reporting system which has been in place since 1984. Approximately 250,000 - 320,000 trip tickets are collected annually. Florida has 4,300 dealers of which 1,200 have submitted tickets. The department has roughly 45 requests per day for historical landings from individual fishermen or dealers.

Several scenarios were offered by the CRFAP trying to determine where the interpretation problems and loopholes lie in each states system. It was suggested by some members of the Panel that the states should tighten up their programs and standardize so that all states have similar requirements to end confusion and eliminate loopholes to reporting.

### **Invasive Species Update**

**R. Lukens** updated the CRFAP on several activities under invasive species. He reported that the ANS Task Force is addressing the use of exotics in science fair projects to prevent the release of these organisms into the environment. **Lukens** reported that there were several workgroups working on issues such as identifying research needs, developing outreach, and oversight of information such as the new and improved invasive species website which is going launched soon. Finally, he reported on a grant which will allow for a Rapid Response Plan similar to the oil spill contingency plan to provide coordination, contact points, and action chain when a release is identified. This should allow for quick assessment and the potential for eradication of the organism.

### **Discussion of Artificial Reef Materials Guideline**

**R. Lukens** reviewed the status of the Artificial Reef Materials Guidelines Document. He indicated that since the last meeting minor editorial changes had been made throughout and that a few substantial rewrites were included to help the readers understand that this is intended as a guidance document only. The TCC has taken action to move this to the full Commission for their approval. Zales indicated concern that there was enough change to the document to warrant an additional six month public review. **Lukens** was not sure about how the delay would affect the ability to print the document with the existing funds. Since there was no quorum, the other members in attendance were queried regarding their thoughts regarding a delay. The consensus was that the document should be moved forward and budgeted funds be expended this year.

### **IJF Activities**

**S. VanderKooy** updated the group on the status of the Striped Bass FMP revision and the Sheepshead Profile currently being developed. It is hoped that by next spring the draft of the Striped Bass FMP should be final and be presented to the TCC for the GSMFC review. Most of the sections are complete but some major editing still needs to be provided by the task force. The Sheepshead Profile is off to a strong start. Most of the task force members appear enthusiastic to get some early momentum. **VanderKooy** believes that this drafting process will be relatively swift.

The otolith manual has surpassed all expectations. To date, 50 hard copies have been produced and distributed along with around 300 CDs. **VanderKooy** has just burned another 100 CDs and plans to print an additional 50 bound copies. The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission continues to work on merging their techniques with ours. Over half the requests for CDs have been from foreign countries from the Netherlands to South America. **VanderKooy** plans to add several more species sometime next spring or early summer including cobia, dolphin, Gulf menhaden, and several groupers.

### **Election of Chairmen**

Without a quorum this item was deferred until the next meeting.

### **Other Business**

It was suggested that at the next meeting in New Orleans staff arrange for a presentation on the changes to the number of issued permits in the Gulf of Mexico to examine historical versus current participation. This would include charter head boat permits which appear to be decreasing over time.

Staff was further directed to arrange for presentations on coastal restoration efforts around the Gulf.

*With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:39 pm.*

**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.***

**TECHNICAL COORDINATING COMMITTEE  
MINUTES - 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
Tuesday, October 14, 2003  
Corpus Christi, Texas**

APPROVED BY:  
*WSP 3/14/04*  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

Chairman Corky Perret called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. The following members and others were present:

**Members**

Steve Heath, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL  
Jerry Mambretti, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX  
Bill Balboa, TPWD, Palacios, TX  
Virginia Vail, *GSMFC Commissioner*, FWC, Tallahassee, FL  
Corky Perret, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Kerwin Cuevas, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
John Roussel, *GSMFC Commissioner*, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Joseph Shepard, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS

**Staff**

Jeff Rester, Habitat/SEAMAP Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Bill Walker, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Marilyn Lawal, USFWS, Atlanta, GA  
Kevin Anson, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL  
Richard Waller, USM GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS  
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Mike Ray, *GSMFC Commissioner*, Austin, TX  
Kevin Madley, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Frank Courtney, FMRI, Port Manatee, FL  
Tom Wagner, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Buck Sutter, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Rocky Ward, TPWD, Palacios, TX  
Bill Karel, TPWD, Palacios, TX  
Art Morris, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX  
Joseph Smith, NMFS, Beaufort, NC  
Douglas Vaughn, NMFS, Beaufort, NC  
John Carmichael, SAFMC, Charleston, SC  
Jim Hanifen, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL

Pamela Baker, Environmental Defense, Corpus Christi, TX  
Susan Gerhart, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Brandon Morley, TPWD, Palacios, TX  
Britt Bungardner, TPWD, Palacios, TX  
Paul Choucair, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Robert Adami, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX  
Jill Jensen, Gulf Restoration Network, New Orleans, LA  
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD  
Terry Cody, Rockport, TX

### **Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was adopted as written.

### **Approval of Minutes**

The minutes for the meeting held on March 18, 2003 were approved as written.

### **State/Federal Reports**

Florida - **V. Vail** stated that the legislature passed increased penalties for criminal marine fisheries violations. The Commission has established a dive permit for fishermen who use scuba gear instead of traps to catch spiny lobster. The Commission also established a ballyhoo permit for the harvest of baitfish. This was a limited entry permit. The Commission has developed a commercial outreach program to help educate commercial fishermen on changes in regulations and notice of upcoming Commission meetings. The Commission is currently evaluating the blue crab fishery and has established a 15-member advisory panel. There is currently a moratorium on blue crab endorsements for the fishery. **V. Vail** reported that the Commission has set a blue crab trap closure in waters greater than 3 miles offshore for 20 days to prevent blue crab fishermen from fishing for stone crabs before the stone crab season starts. The Commission has defined derelict traps and has established rules for nonprofit organizations to pick up derelict traps. **V. Vail** stated that distributing disaster relief funding to shrimpers is still ongoing.

Alabama - **S. Heath** stated that a rapid assessment survey of Mobile Bay was recently completed. The purpose of the survey was to establish a baseline of species and distributions inhabiting the Bay in order to be able to detect non-native species in later surveys as well as to reveal any non-native species already inhabiting the Bay. A number of agencies assisted in the collection of specimens. **S. Heath** reported that Alabama continues their derelict crab trap removal efforts. Approximately 2,500 red snapper fingerlings were tagged and released recently from the fish hatchery on low profile reefs off Alabama. **S. Heath** also stated that while his department was not directly involved, shrimp aquaculture has begun in central Alabama.

Mississippi - **K. Cuevas** stated that the Mississippi Artificial Reef Program is working with the Derelict Vessel Program to clean abandoned derelict vessels and deploy them as artificial reefs. Gill net and trammel net license holders were added to the trip ticket program. Shrimp season opened June 10 in Mississippi waters and summer landings totals were approximately 6 million pounds. The Department of Marine Resources is currently trying to distribute disaster relief funds to shrimpers.

The Shrimp and Crab Bureau received two awards for the derelict crab trap retrieval program. Oyster season closed May 24. Approximately 391,000 sacks of oysters were harvested during the 2002-2003 season. **K. Cuevas** stated that the Shellfish Program recently planted 90 acres of reef in Jackson County.

Louisiana - **J. Shepard** reported that Louisiana deployed ten oil and gas platforms in their artificial reef sites over the summer. Louisiana received the largest donation to date, a \$2.5 million donation for a platform that was toppled in place. An oyster stock assessment was performed in July on public grounds. It showed a slight increase in seed oysters, but a slight decrease in sack oysters. Legislation was passed that allowed the department to implement a derelict trap removal program. Other legislation was passed that requires crab trap escape rings to be open during March. The Commission established two crabbing closures to allow for the removal of derelict crab traps. From February 28 through March 14, crabbing will be closed in portions of Lafourche and Terrebonne parishes. Another closure will coincide with the opening of shrimp season in Vermillion Bay. Shrimp landings totaled 170 million pounds in 2002. Preliminary 2003 landings total 49.5 million pounds through August. Fifty-eight hundred notices were sent out to qualified individuals concerning shrimp disaster relief funds; approximately 3,800 were returned.

Texas - **J. Mambretti** reported that coastal fisheries was sampling tarpon, sharks, and shoal grass for genetics work. Menhaden fin clip samples have been obtained throughout the Gulf of Mexico. The Texas Aquaculture Program reported that no diseases have occurred recently in shrimp aquaculture facilities along the coast. The Artificial Reef Program deployed six structures this year that contributed about one million dollars to the program. The shrimp license buyback program has reduced the number of shrimp licenses by approximately thirty percent. The current number of licenses issued is 2,200. To date, one thousand five licenses have been bought back for almost \$5.7 million. Spotted sea trout were stocked in Sabine Lake recently. New regulations were set on for hire vessels. Daily bag limits are limited to customers only. New spotted sea trout regulations allow for one fish over 25 inches per day. Guide permit fees were raised this year to \$200. Texas officials met with Mexican officials to discuss the Kemp ridley recovery plan. Approximately \$5.5 million will be distributed to shrimpers for disaster relief. A red tide was recently discovered in San Antonio Bay. **J. Mambretti** reported that in order to promote fishing, the legislature waived the requirement for fishing licenses in Texas state parks.

USFWS - **D. Frugé** reported that Dr. Mamie Parker is the new Assistant Director of Fisheries. He stated that the FWS continues active participation in and facilitation of efforts to organize the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership involving state and federal inland and marine fisheries agencies and organizations. A Memorandum of Understanding has been developed to formalize the partnership, and signatures of partner agencies are currently being sought. There were 8,297 Kemp's ridley sea turtle nests on Rancho Nuevo, Mexico beaches this year. A total of 19 nests were recorded in Texas and two in other US areas. The FWS published a final rule in the *Federal Register* on October 2 amending regulations authorizing limited take of double-crested cormorants without a permit to control fish depredation problems. The new rule extends the take provisions to commercial aquaculture facilities, as well as state and federal fish hatcheries, and to off-site roosting areas in the vicinity of aquaculture facilities during October through April.

## **Gulf Menhaden Genetics**

**B. Mobley** stated that the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department was currently examining the geographic distribution of three menhaden species in the Gulf of Mexico. The species were Gulf, finescale, and yellowfin menhaden. **B. Mobley** stated that the objective of the project is to assess spatial and temporal genetic variability and genetic structure of Gulf menhaden on the Texas coast and to compare genetic parameters across the distribution of the species. A minimum of 50 young of the year Gulf menhaden will be collected from each major bay system within Texas. Additional samples will be collected from scientists across the species distribution. Samples will be collected for three years. Researchers hope to gain a better understanding of Gulf menhaden stock structure, to obtain a better grasp of the relatedness between the menhaden species and to be able to determine if the genetic data observed in Atlantic menhaden will be useful in monitoring genetic diversity and integrity in Gulf menhaden.

## **Southeast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR)**

**J. Carmichael** stated that the SEDAR process began in 2002 as a rigorous review of the data, methods, and results from the 2002 red porgy stock assessment. SEDAR began as a way to include more participation from biologists, data managers, analysts, stakeholders and fishery managers. The goal of SEDAR is to improve the quality, reliability, and relevance of stock assessments. **J. Carmichael** stated that SEDAR has several objectives which include broadening the scope of participation, providing an open and transparent process, reducing data errors and omissions, reducing reliance on individual decision-making, ensuring consistency in products, ensuring required products are provided, and improving planning and coordination. **J. Carmichael** reported that SEDAR strives to shift responsibility for input data manipulation, model selection, and model parameter assumptions from a small group of assessment scientists and biologists to a broad group of participants from many disciplines. The goal is better assessments, not necessarily faster assessments.

## **California Ban on Gulf Oysters**

**C. Perret** stated that the California Department of Health has prohibited the importation of Gulf of Mexico oysters from April through October every year due to *Vibrio* virus concerns. Governors of Gulf states have written letters of opposition to this ban. Statistics show that between 1991 and 2000 in California, forty-one illnesses and twenty-three deaths occurred due to Gulf oysters containing *Vibrio*. **C. Perret** stated that the prohibition is now permanent and that the Gulf states may file suit.

## **Subcommittee Reports**

Anadromous - **D. Frugé** stated that the Anadromous Subcommittee is still working through the Striped Bass Task Force on the Striped Bass FMP.

Crab - **T. Wagner** reported that the Subcommittee reviewed derelict trap programs throughout the Gulf. **T. Wagner** stated that Mississippi would hold a closed season and removal day during late March 2004. Alabama will hold a removal day in early March. Alabama has cancelled their deepwater removal efforts due to a lack of participation. Louisiana passed legislation this past year that will allow them to hold a deepwater removal in Vermillion Bay and a shallow water removal

in Terrebonne and Timbalier Bays. Texas will hold their third closed season February 20-29 targeting the central coast to Sabine Lake. Florida passed a debris and derelict trap rule this year and a limited trap removal effort in St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge removed 114 traps. **T. Wagner** stated that he was again elected Chairman.

SEAMAP - **J. Hanifen** stated that SEAMAP conducted the Spring and Fall Plankton Surveys and the Summer Shrimp/Groundfish Survey since the March meeting. SEAMAP established priorities on how to use a possible slight increase in SEAMAP funding for 2004. The South Atlantic Board finally approved SEAMAP's goals and objectives for a coordinated fishery independent monitoring program. The TCC and Commission approved these at a previous meeting. **J. Hanifen** stated that SEAMAP is now again moving forward with this issue. The Subcommittee also discussed GIS mapping of SEAMAP data. **J. Hanifen** reported he was again elected Chairman with S. Heath serving as Vice-chairman.

Data Management - **P. Campbell** stated that the Subcommittee discussed using birth date as part of a unique identifier for registration tracking. Some of the Subcommittee members were not comfortable with this concept so the Subcommittee referred it back to the registration tracking committee for discussion. The Subcommittee passed a motion to ask the TCC to approve the concept for the states to begin implementation of the registration of fishing tournaments. The TCC tabled this motion. The TCC agreed with the idea in concept, but wanted the state representatives to explore what would need to be done to accomplish the task and what the benefits of the fishing tournament registration would be. **P. Campbell** stated she was again elected Chairman.

Artificial Reef - **R. Lukens** reported that the Subcommittee met April 2-3, the second day in conjunction with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's Artificial Reef Committee. The two committees discussed working with the Maritime Administration to convert retired ships to artificial reefs. The states feel the federal government should bear the costs of preparing, towing and sinking the ships. The states also feel that the government should maintain ownership of the vessels and the associated liability until they are in place on the bottom. The Subcommittee will be working with the Maritime Administration to work on these issues. **R. Lukens** stated that he distributed the revised "Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials" to the TCC and was asking for TCC approval to forward the document to the Commission for their approval. The TCC granted their approval of the document.

Habitat - **J. Rester** reported that Mark LaSalle was again elected Chairman. He stated that the Subcommittee worked on two major items. The first was an update of the Commission's "Summary of Aquaculture Programs by State" document. The Subcommittee finalized the document this summer and will forward it to the TCC for their review in the coming weeks. The next item was updating the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's Mariculture Policy. The Subcommittee drafted the new policy as part of the joint Habitat Program between the Council and Commission. **J. Rester** stated that the Subcommittee made several changes to the policy, and the Council will be reviewing the policy at their upcoming November meeting.

*With no other business the meeting adjourned at 5:00 p.m.*

**STATE-FEDERAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**  
**MINUTES - 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting**  
**Wednesday, October 15, 2003**  
**Corpus Christi, Texas**

**APPROVED BY:**  
  
**COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN**

Facilitator Larry Simpson called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. The following members and others were present:

**Members**

Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve Heath, *GSMFC Commissioner*, ADCNR, Gulf Shores, AL  
Corky Perret, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Mike Ray, *GSMFC Commissioner*, TPWD, Austin, TX  
John Roussel, *GSMFC Commissioner*, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Larry Simpson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Buck Sutter, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Virginia Vail, *GSMFC Commissioner*, FFWCC, Tallahassee, FL

**Staff**

Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Madeleine Travis, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Pamela Baker, Corpus Christi, TX  
Britt Bumgardner, TPWD, Palacios, TX  
Page Campbell, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Susan Gerhart, FMRI, St. Petersburg, FL  
Terry Henwood, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Jill Jensen, GRN, New Orleans, LA  
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD  
Marilyn Lawal, USFWS, Atlanta, GA  
Art Morris, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX  
Jeff Rank, Texas Sea Grant, Bay City, TX  
Ralph Rayburn, Texas Sea Grant, College Station, TX  
Phil Steele, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
William Walker, *GSMFC Commissioner*, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Borden Wallace, Daybrook Fisheries, Empire, LA  
John Ward, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD

**Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was adopted as presented.



### Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on March 19, 2003 in Point Clear, Alabama were approved as presented, and the minutes of the meeting held on August 21, 2003 in New Orleans, Louisiana were approved as presented.

### Menhaden Advisory Committee Report

**C. Perret**, Chairman of the Menhaden Advisory Committee reported that J. Smith of NMFS provided his annual review of the menhaden fishing season. Oil yields were low in May but increased through June. Landings through September were 463,047 mt which is down 12% from 2002 and down 11% from the previous 5-yr average. May, June and August had the highest monthly landings with July being considerably lower due primarily to Tropical Storm Bill and Hurricane Claudette. September was lower than expected in part due to Tropical Storm Larry.

Four factories operated in the Gulf in 2003 with 42 vessels unloading menhaden for reduction, 39 regular steamers, and 2 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 5-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 of 512,000 mt. Assuming similar effort and vessels, it is forecasted that 2004 could see 510,000 mt of fish harvested.

**Perret** reported that D. Vaughan of NMFS presented preliminary results and explained some of the components going into the Gulf menhaden stock assessment. Vaughan went through the forward projecting age structured model he is using in the assessment and explained his data sources. 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 will keep the MAC updated on his progress.

**Perret** reported that B. Mobley of Texas Parks and Wildlife (TPWD) gave a presentation on 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. They have also compared their stocks with other stocks from the Gulf and a few locations on the Atlantic. Their data allows them to accurately identify between the four species of *Patronus* which occur. TPWD is in their first year of a three year study.

**Perret** reported that E. Cortes from the NMFS Panama City lab, presented the LCS stock assessment specifically addressing the bycatch component from the menhaden fishery. Cortes demonstrated that including the bycatch from several sources, including menhaden, had little or no effect on the outcome of the assessment. He assured the MAC that even at the 1994-95 levels, no change in the current assessment was necessary. The MAC pointed out that with the advances since that study on reduction efforts by the industry, it should be a non-issue. This discussion hopefully addresses the GMFMC's questions regarding this issue. **C. Perret** also noted the bycatch study being conducted by the Mississippi DMR also indicates fairly low levels of bycatch in the menhaden fishery.

**Perret** reported that 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 then 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 Louisiana trip ticket system to help reduce duplication of reporting by the industry. Staff will make the arrangements.

**Perret** reported that B. Wallace of Daybrook Fisheries was elected as Chairman of the MAC.

**Perret** reported that T. Gascon of Omega Protein reported that both Daybrook Fisheries and Omega Protein would re-institute the Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Advisory Council. Gascon had previously served as Executive Director of the Advisory Council. **Perret** reported the MAC passed a motion to reinstate the Executive Director of the Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Advisory Council as a voting member of the Menhaden Advisory Committee. Finally, some minor changes were noted on the membership roster of the MAC with R. Schillaci becoming the Omega member and T. Gascon as his alternate. It was also suggested that the GMFMC be added to the list for mail-outs in order to insure that they are aware of future MAC activities.

**C. Perret moved to accepted the Menhaden Advisory Committee report and to endorse the reinstatement of the Executive Director of the Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Advisory Council as a voting member of the Menhaden Advisory Committee. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.**

#### **Commercial/Recreational Fishery Advisory Panel Report**

**S. VanderKooy** reported that two commercial and two recreational members of the Advisory Panel were in attendance. Since there was not a quorum they met in a work session.

**VanderKooy** reported on a discussion regarding the recent error in the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey (MRFSS) data which led to a 6% inflation of the recreational red snapper catch prior to its being identified and corrected. At issue was the process by which the MRFSS data is reviewed and errors are corrected. D. Donaldson explained how this particular mistake was missed and how changes are being made to reduce the possibility of having them occur in the future. R. Zales requested that the NMFS re-examine the MRFSS data back to 1996 before conducting the new assessment for red snapper. He also would like a recreational fishing member to be added to the wave meetings to help in this process. Zales acknowledged that the current system is much better than the previous one and that this is a problem with human error, not a flawed data program. **Donaldson** indicated that they would look into Zales suggestions.

**VanderKooy** reported that at the last meeting of the C/RFAP there was considerable discussion regarding trip tickets in various states. Each of the four states using trip tickets gave a presentation on how their program works, who reports, and when they must report. Several scenarios were offered by the C/RFAP trying to determine where the problem areas lie. It was suggested by some members of the Panel that the states should standardize so they all states have similar requirements.

**VanderKooy** reported that R. Lukens updated the C/RFAP on several activities underway with invasive species. Lukens reported that the ANS Task Force is addressing the use of exotics in science fair projects to prevent the release of these organisms into the environment. Lukens reported that several workgroups are addressing issues such as identifying research needs, developing outreach, and oversight of information such as the new and improved invasive species website which will be available soon. Lukens reported on a grant which will allow for a Rapid Response Plan similar to the oil spill contingency plan to provide coordination, contact points, and action when a release is identified. This should allow for quick assessment and the eradication of the organisms.

**VanderKooy** reported that Lukens also reviewed the status of the Artificial Reef Materials Guidelines Document. Lukens indicated that since the last meeting minor editorial changes had been made and a few substantial rewrites were included to help the readers understand that this is intended as a guidance document only. The Technical Coordinating Committee has taken action to move this document to the full Commission for their approval. **VanderKooy** reported that R. Zales indicated concern that there was enough change to the document to warrant an additional six month public review. Lukens was not sure if the delay would affect the ability to print the document with existing funds. Since there was no quorum, the other members in attendance were queried regarding their thoughts regarding a delay. The consensus was that the document should be moved forward and budgeted funds be expended this year.

**VanderKooy** reported that it was suggested at the March meeting in New Orleans, staff present changes to the number of issued permits in the Gulf of Mexico to examine historical and current participation. This would include charter/head boat permits which appear to be decreasing over time. Staff was further directed to arrange for a presentation on coastal restoration efforts around the Gulf.

**L. Simpson** suggested that about a month before the March meeting S. VanderKooy send a letter to all members of the C/RFAP encouraging them to let us know whether they will be able to attend the meeting.

### **FIN Program Update**

**D. Donaldson** reported that at the August meeting of the S/FFMC the decision was made to go ahead with full funding for the FIN program assuming that NMFS would not take the 5% tax on the Gulf Fin line item. A letter concerning this matter was written to B. Hogarth of NMFS and his response was distributed to Committee members. **Donaldson** noted that NMFS is taking the 5% tax and therefore the budget must be reworked. Two new activities had been added, a pilot survey for head boat at-sea sampling in Alabama and detailed effort pilot survey in Louisiana. Deleting those two items from the budget still leaves an overage of \$95,000. **Donaldson** asked Committee members if they wished to work on the budget at this meeting or if they preferred a conference call since this needs to be done as quickly as possible. At this time the Committee agreed to defer this matter until the end of the S/FFMC meeting.

**Donaldson** distributed a white paper on out-of-state dealers which was raised at the Data Management Subcommittee meeting in March 2003. This issue was also discussed at the Law Enforcement Committee and Commercial/Recreational Fisheries Advisory Panel meetings held earlier this week. The issue is, if you fish in the EEZ you can land fish in Alabama and transport it in your vehicle to another state without having to make a report. The problem lies in the definition

of "landings" in Alabama since a catch has to be sold before it is considered "landed". This problem involves law enforcement, legislation, and trip tickets. Alabama is working on rectifying the problem and S. Heath will keep the S/FFMC informed on the progress of this situation.

Donaldson provided Committee members with a matrix for using marine recreational fishing licenses as a sampling frame for fishing effort for shore and private rental mode. **Donaldson** noted that progress is being made, however each state must meet all the criteria before fishing licenses can be used as a sampling frame. The only gap is the shore fishing exemption and telephone number in Florida. V. Vail reported that in Florida there has been discussion on re-evaluating the licensing system and fees. The Committee also discussed confidentiality issues relating to using license files.

The Committee was provided with two draft MOAs which deal with the sharing of confidential information. One is for the Gulf states and the other is for Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Updated state statutes regarding confidentiality were also provided and are included in the two MOAs. The Committee reviewed the amended MOAs and after discussion several minor changes were made. Staff was directed to draft a cover letter to NOAA General Counsel encouraging them to review of the MOAs and to add any additional authorities. **J. Roussel** suggested asking NOAA General Counsel to give us clear guidance regarding whether all or only part of the FIN dataset are protected, *i.e.* if there is a state managed species in the FIN database, do federal authorities provide protection for that data or is it only for federally managed species. **Roussel** also suggested having the legal counsel from each state simultaneously give a similar review stating which data is protected by the states. A draft cover letter will be sent to members of this Committee for their review. **V. Vail** moved to have the MOAs and a cover letter, including time line and request for review with a return date, prepared for NOAA General Counsel and state counsels prior to a scheduled conference call. These packages will be sent to Committee members and they will forward to their appropriate counsels. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.

#### **Status of IJF Fishery Management Plans and Other IJF Activities**

**S. VanderKooy** provided Committee members with a summary of the activities of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries (IJF) program. The striped bass FMP revision is 97% complete and the task force will be meeting in Apalachicola in November to begin the final editing process. **VanderKooy** reported that the sheepshead profile is underway. An introductory meeting of the sheepshead group was held in New Orleans and several sections have been drafted. Another meeting of this group will be held in November and VanderKooy will keep the S/FFMC informed.

**VanderKooy** reported that other than printing and distribution of the otolith manual, activities of that group has ceased and is being carried on by the FIN program. The initial copies of the otolith manual have been distributed and another 150 copies will be printed. 300 CDs have been distributed of which 50% were mailed internationally.

**VanderKooy** reported that in February and March of 2004 Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama will have crab trap cleanup programs.

## Interstate Shrimp Management Plan

**Dr. John Ward** of NMFS Office of Constituent Services gave a presentation on the Interstate Shrimp Management Plan. **Ward** explained that this is a new NMFS office and the purpose is to provide advice, information, and outreach for industry and other constituents involved in marine resources. This office is trying to help the shrimp industry improve their financial viability. Several public meetings have been in the Gulf including Brownsville, Houston, and Tampa, as well as two meetings in the South Atlantic area. Ideas were solicited from industry, academics, Sea Grant agents, and state agency representatives to help the shrimp industry recover from low prices. As a result several options were examined including limited entry, permit moratorium, licenses, cooperatives, market promotion, vessel buyback programs, loans, and possible waivers on U.S. citizenship on fishing vessels in the Gulf and South Atlantic.

**Ward** reported that NMFS worked with a group of contractors including Wade Griffin from Texas A&M, Walter Keithly from LSU, Rich Woodward from Texas A&M, and Chuck Adams from the University of Florida. Two volunteers were also part of the group, Mike Haby of Texas Sea Grant and Jim Kirkley of Virginia Institute of Marine Science. **Ward** noted that the report developed by this group includes a section on international trends in the shrimp industry and how imports have affected prices. There is also a section on domestic trends which indicates how landings and values have changed over time. These data have been used to develop impact studies on salaries, income, and employment levels and also to look at the profitability of the fishing fleet. **Ward** noted that hopefully in the near future the results of this report will be presented to the shrimp industry and then to other interested parties.

Committee discussion followed **Ward's** presentation and he noted that the results should be presented in about one month. The Committee discussed meeting attendance and state participation and noted that there has been little discussion or involvement at the state level concerning shrimp management. **Ward** noted that this advice is being developed for the fishermen because they requested it and how they proceed is up to them. **P. Steele** noted that R. Crabtree and W. Hogarth agreed that with a limited entry program there needs to be a partnership with the states to attain maximum economic efficiency in the shrimp fishery. **L. Simpson** noted that the states need to consider what they will do if the GMFMC passes limited entry for the shrimp fishery in the Gulf of Mexico.

**B. Sutter** of NMFS noted that 21,000 applications and notifications were sent out to permit holders, Sea Grant offices, state agencies, etc. to let everyone know that a permit is now required. **Sutter** asked if there was anything else that could be done before December to notify fishermen. **C. Perret** requested that **Sutter** send each state director a letter stating the number of permits issued for that state for the shrimp fishery in the EEZ. **L. Simpson** suggested using newspaper articles and NOAA radio.

## Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership

**D. Frugé** of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service gave a presentation on the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP) noting that this partnership has evolved over the last few years. It began as an effort among several of the inland states over who should pay for stocking trout as mitigation for losses of habitat. The process of getting the inland fisheries agencies to cooperate caused those

involved to realize that there was more than the mitigation issue. This process led to setting up the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership.

**Frugé** reported that the Southeast has the highest aquatic diversity in the country with 70 river basins, 26,000 miles of coastal shoreline, and more licensed anglers than any other region. The Southeast also has the burden of many endangered or threatened fish and native mussel species, dams and reservoirs, non-native aquatic species, and sprawling metropolitan areas, all of which dramatically alter habitat.

The mission of the SARP is to protect, conserve, and restore aquatic resources including habitats throughout the Southeast for the continuing benefit, use, and enjoyment of the American people. Currently the SARP is comprised of more than 12 state resource agencies, FWS, NMFS, Commissions and Councils, and others. Public use, fishery mitigation, imperiled fish and aquatic species recovery, interjurisdictional fisheries, aquatic habitat conservation, and aquatic nuisance species are the key focus areas of the SARP.

**Frugé** distributed a position announcement for an aquatic nuisance species coordinator which will hopefully, with future funding, become the SARP coordinator. **Frugé** noted that the SARP is applying for a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant which can be matched with federal aid and partners are being requested to help match that grant by November 1, 2003. **R. Lukens** noted that funds will be available to the states through a grant to develop aquatic nuisance species plans.

**L. Simpson** reviewed the presentation and asked the Committee if they wanted the GSMFC to become a signatory to the SARP which would not necessarily involve a commitment of funds. **C. Perret** moved for the consideration and action of the full Commission to become a signatory member of the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership. The motion was seconded passed unanimously.

### **Habitat Program Report**

**J. Rester** provided a report on the Habitat Program noting that he has been involved with the GMFMC Essential Fish Habitat (EFH) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The draft EFH EIS went out for public review at the end of August and public comment is due by November 29, 2003. The GMFMC has designated the Flower Gardens National Marine Sanctuary, the Florida Middle Grounds, the Tortugas Ecological Reserve, and the Madison Swanson Marine Reserve area as habitat areas of particular concern.

**Rester** reported that the Annotated Bibliography of Fishing Impacts on Habitat was recently updated for the third time. The update contains 52 new citations for papers dealing with the impact of fishing on habitat. The entire bibliography now contains 725 citations.

**Rester** reported that the GSMFC had been working on a proposal for the Derelict Trap Task Force to NOAA's Community Based Restoration Program. NOAA has decided to fund the proposal in the amount of \$192,500 to begin removal of derelict traps in 2004. Trap removal is planned next spring and summer in Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. **Rester** reported that Texas and Alabama will receive \$30,000 each, Louisiana and Mississippi will receive \$56,250 each, and the GSMFC will receive \$20,000 to administer the program.

### Election of Chairman/Facilitator

**C. Perret** moved to elect **John Roussel** of Louisiana as Chairman of the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously. Chairman Roussel appointed L. Simpson as Facilitator.

### Other Business

As noted earlier in this meeting under the agenda item FIN Data Program Update, due to a shortfall the FIN budget must be reworked. Two new activities had been added to the budget this year, a pilot survey for head boat at-sea sampling in Alabama and detailed effort pilot survey in Louisiana. Deleting those two items from the budget still leaves an overage of \$95,370. After Committee discussion the following reductions in the budget were made: GSMFC cut \$12,000 for work group meetings, training, and travel; Louisiana can capture head boat survey information by changing the methodology reducing the budget by \$28,811, leaving approximately \$54,500 to be cut. **J. Roussel** suggested cuts in biological sampling to further reduce the budget. The Committee agreed to hold a conference call to decide where to cut the remaining overage. **D. Donaldson** will e-mail the revised spreadsheet to Committee members highlighting the cuts discussed at this meeting.

*There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:10 p.m.*

**COMMISSION BUSINESS MEETING  
MINUTES - 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting  
Thursday, October 16, 2003  
University Texas Marine Science Institute (UTMSI)  
Corpus Christi, Texas**



Chairman Mike Ray called the meeting to order at 9:10 a.m and invited the Commissioners and guests to introduce themselves.

L. Simpson noted that a quorum was present and reviewed pertinent rules and regulations regarding voting procedures.

The following Commissioners and/or proxies were present:

**Commissioners**

Steve Heath, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL (*Proxy for Barnett Lawley*)  
Mike Ray, TPWD, Austin, TX (*Proxy for Robert L. Cook*)  
Walter J. Blessey, IV, GSMFC, Biloxi, MS  
Gene Seaman, Texas House of Representatives, Austin, TX  
Corky Perret, MDMR, Biloxi, MS (*Proxy for William Walker*)  
Billy Hewes, Mississippi Senate, Gulfport, MS  
John Roussel, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA (*Proxy for James H. Jenkins*)  
Virginia Vail, FL FWC, Tallahassee, FL (*Proxy for Ken Haddad*)  
William Ward, GSMFC, Tampa, FL

**Staff**

Larry Simpson, Executive Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ron Lukens, Assistant Director, Ocean Springs, MS  
Ginny Herring, Administrative Officer, Ocean Springs, MS  
Nancy Marcellus, Administrative Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS  
Dave Donaldson, Data Program Manager, Ocean Springs, MS  
Steve VanderKooy, IJF Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jeff Rester, SEAMAP/Habitat Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Jason S. Keenum, Staff Accountant, Ocean Springs, MS

**Others**

Buck Sutter, NOAA/NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS  
Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Anne Lange, NMFS, Silver Spring, MD  
Ralph Rayburn, Texas Sea Grant, College Station, TX  
Larry E. Young, TPWD, Austin, TX



## **Adoption of Agenda**

The agenda was approved as presented.

## **Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held March 19-20, 2003, were reviewed. **M. Ray noted minor typographical corrections. J. Roussel moved to approve corrections and minutes. C. Perret seconded. The minutes were approved without objection.**

## **GSMFC Standing Committee Reports**

**Law Enforcement Committee (LEC)** - **Larry Young** introduced himself as the new Chairman of the LEC. He reported that the LEC met on Tuesday, October 14, 2003. Among topics discussed by the LEC was the trip ticket program. The LEC unanimously endorsed a fully implemented, Gulf-wide trip ticket system with continued input from the enforcement sector.

Discussions continued on Joint Enforcement Agreements (JEAs) with NOAA Office of Law Enforcement and all agreed to work to improve the program.

Other discussions included the various states involvement in homeland security and budget problems regarding out-of-state travel. John T. Jenkins was elected as new Vice Chairman.

**C. Perret moved to approve the report. W. Blessey seconded, the LEC report was approved without objection.**

**Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC) Report** - **C. Perret** reported that the TCC met on Tuesday, October 14, 2003. The Committee received status reports from the various states, NMFS and FWS. The following subcommittees reported to the TCC: Anadromous; Crab; SEAMAP; Data Management; Artificial Reef; and, Habitat.

**On behalf of the TCC and Artificial Reef Subcommittee, C. Perret recommended that the Commission approve, ratify and publish “Guidelines for Marine Artificial Reef Materials”. V. Vail moved to approve the guidelines for publication with some editorial corrections. S. Heath seconded. The motion was approved without objection.**

**Without objection, the TCC report was approved.**

**State-Federal Fisheries Management Committee (S-FFMC) Report** - **L. Simpson** stated that the S-FFMC met the morning of Tuesday, October 14, 2003. The Committee received reports from the Menhaden Advisory Committee (MAC); Commercial/Recreational Fishery Advisory Panel (CRFAP); and, updates on Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program; Fisheries Information Network Programs; and, Habitat programs.

The Commission continues to work on the Menhaden CDFR data entry. The MAC asked J. Shepard to give a presentation on the feasibility of converting the CDFRs to the Louisiana trip ticket system to help reduce duplication of reporting by the industry.

B. Zales requested that the NMFS re-examine the MRFSS data back to 1996 before conducting the new assessment for red snapper. He also would like a recreational fishing member to be added to the wave meetings to help in this process. The CRFAP suggested that the states standardize their trip ticket program so that all states have similar requirements. **L. Simpson** reported that CRFAP reviewed the status of the Artificial Reef Materials Guidelines Document. B. Zales was concerned that there was enough changes to the document to warrant an additional 6 month review. After discussion, the consensus of the CRFAP was that the document should be moved forward and budgeted funds be expended this year.

The S-FFMC reviewed state statutes on confidentiality and the updated Gulf and Caribbean MOAs which include additional federal legislation. The committee requested the staff to send the MOAs to the various state directors, their legal counsels, and to NOAA General Counsel prior to a conference call to be held with all parties.

D. Frugé gave a presentation on the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership. **The S-FFMC discussed funding of this program and requested the Commission become a signatory to the MOA of the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership while not necessarily contributing funds to this effort. The Commission urged D. Frugé to invite Texas to sign the MOU. C. Perret moved to sign the MOA. W. Ward seconded. The motion passed.**

**V. Vail moved to approve the S-FFMC report. W. Ward seconded. The S-FFMC report was approved without objection.**

#### **NMFS Southeast Regional Office (NMFS/SERO) Report**

**B. Sutter** reported on behalf of the NMFS/SERO. He stated that he and Roy Crabtree looked forward to working with and building a strong relationship with the Commission.

He reported on the status of shrimp permits in the various Gulf states. Currently, the total of permits by states is: Alabama - 160; Florida - 370; Louisiana - 676; Mississippi - 220; and, Texas - 815; for a total of 2,241 in the Gulf states. He will contact the state directors when he returns to his office and request assistance in getting the word out to the industry regarding the December 31 deadline for getting their EEZ permits.

The number of applications for charter permits as of September 15, is: 1,652 - coastal migratory pelagic permits; and, 1,559 - reef fish permits for charter/head boat.

**B. Sutter** reported that Ginny Faye will be the new Division Chief for Sustainable Fisheries and Miles Croom will head the Habitat Division.

Some issues that the new staff will be addressing under the Protective Resources Division include studies on the impact of oil and gas exploration in the Central and Eastern Gulf of Mexico on protected species; and, dredging impact on Gulf sturgeon in the Pascagoula River and Pensacola area.

In conclusion, **B. Sutter** emphasized that the SERO was committed to working with the Commission and encouraged the states to contact him or Roy Crabtree with any concerns.

## **USFWS Region 4 Office Report**

**D. Frugé** reported on behalf of USFWS Region 4. He reported on the status of the Kemps ridley sea turtles on Rancho Nuevo, Mexico, which continue to show a steady increase. A total of 19 nests were recorded in Texas and two in other U. S. areas. Over 474,000 hatchlings were released.

FWS Special Agents assisted LDWF in an investigation that resulted in arrest and conviction under the Lacey Act. The case involved two men involved in illegal interstate commerce of oysters.

The Cameron Prairie National Wildlife Refuge in Southwest Louisiana was recognized by the Coastal America Program for an innovative partnership that is helping to protect Louisiana coastal marshes. In addition to benefitting waterfowl and other wildlife, the project should help to protect habitat important to estuarine-dependent coastal fishery species.

The FWS announced that the U.S. was prohibiting the importation of queen conch products from Honduras, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti under the CITES. Significant declines in populations of the species have occurred.

In conclusion, **D. Frugé** reported that the FWS published a final rule in the *Federal Register* on October 3 amending regulations authorizing limited take of double-crested cormorants without a permit to control fish depredation problems. The final rule provisions apply only to lands and fresh waters of certain states, including all five Gulf states.

## **FY 2004 NMFS Budget**

**L. Simpson** compared the House and Senate budget marks on items of interest to the Commission. The RecFIN mark in the House is \$3,450 million and \$3,950 million in the Senate, therefore it will go to conference. MARFIN, Gulf FIN, and the Commission's Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program remain level funded. He pointed out that the House mark for SEAMAP was level funded but the Senate version requested an additional \$350K. The Regional Council mark in the House was \$547K less than the Senate mark. The Enforcement and Surveillance mark was \$16K less than in FY 2003

**L. Simpson** pointed out that the language regarding base funding in the Senate version states that "*Funds provided under program, project, or activity lines shall not be used for overhead, including internal and external taxes charged by NMFS, NOAA, or the Department of Commerce.* He additionally pointed out that the language regarding fisheries Research and Management (specifically RecFIN) states *The Committee also expects that the Pacific, Atlantic, and Gulf States shall each receive one-third of the remaining RecFIN funds.*

**L. Simpson** will continue to keep the Commissioners informed and thinks that in the current budget year, level funding is a good thing.

## **FY 2004 USFWS Budget.**

**D. Frugé** presented budget information that showed trends in FWS budgets for the period FY2000 through FY2004. He pointed out that ecological services and fisheries are down over the previous year, while law enforcement shows a slight increase and the refuge system migratory birds show a

healthy increase. He referred to his hand out which graphically showed these trends. He reviewed fisheries funding history. Nationwide, the fisheries budget decreased in 2004, back to the 2002 level. He pointed out that although the Fishery Resource and Coordination Offices has increased over the last 10 years, the percent of the total Fisheries budget has decreased.

**C. Perret** expressed concern over the continuing decreases in fishery funding. **D. Frugé** asked if the Commission had received a response from FWS Director regarding their concerns regarding the inequities in the fisheries programs in the Southeast. **L. Simpson** stated that they have not received a response. **D. Frugé** urged the Commission to continue to pursue this discussion with the Assistant Director for Fisheries and Habitat Conservation, Mamie Parker. **R. Lukens** stated that he would re-send the letter to M. Parker.

### **Executive Committee Report**

**M. Ray** reported that the Executive Committee met for lunch on Wednesday, October 15, 2003. The committee received a report on the internal controls and policies of the Commission. **They recommended that the Commission approve the FY 2004 budget in the amount of \$5,428,363. Based on supervisor recommendations and current budget conditions, they recommended that the entire staff receive a 2% salary increase, and additional increases in the amount of \$1,000 for Gayle Jones, and \$500 for Deanna Valentine, Greg Bray, Dave Donaldson, Ron Lukens, and Larry Simpson.** **W. Blessey** moved to accept the Executive Committee's recommendations. **J. Roussel** seconded. The motion was approved.

### **GSMFC Staff Reports**

Derelict Trap Programs in the Southeast Region - **J. Rester** reported that the Commission has received funding in the amount \$192,500 from NOAA's Community Based Restoration Program for Derelict Trap Task projects. The majority of these funds are for subawards to the States. Texas - \$30,000; Louisiana - \$56,250; Mississippi - \$56,250; Alabama - \$30,000; and the Commission - \$20,000.

FIN 2004 Activities - **D. Donaldson** reviewed 2004 activities. He pointed out that the new initiatives planned for 2004 will not be conducted due to NOAA taxing the program funds.

**The meeting recessed at 11 noon.**

During lunch at UTMSI, the following presentations were made:

**Dr. Wayne Gartner**, Director of UTMSI, introduced himself and gave an overview of the Marine Science Institute, part of the University of Texas at Austin. UTMSI's mission is education, research and outreach with an emphasis on biogeochemistry, ecological dynamics, fish physiology, and ecology. He briefed the Commissioners on current research being conducted at the facility in coordination with other agencies and individuals.

**Professor Peter Thomas**, UTMSI discussed his research in hormonal control of reproduction in fish. He is currently conducting research along Houston's ship channel. His research shows pollution impairs gonadal/gamete growth in both male and female fish.

**Professor Lee Fuiman**, UTMSI presented his research in larval fish biology and ecology. His discussion covered basic fish biology, development and ecology, recruitment mechanisms, and fishery science infrastructure.

**Dr. John Wes Tunnel**, Texas A & M Center for Coastal Studies, presented a discussion of current Gulf of Mexico initiatives being conducted by the Harte Research Institute.

**Following the luncheon, the entire group returned to the Omni Hotel. The meeting reconvened at 2:30 pm.**

### **Fisheries Impacts of Underwater Explosives Used in Platform Salvage in the Gulf of Mexico**

**Gregg Gitschlag** presented results of his research relating to the fisheries impacts of underwater explosives used to remove oil and gas platforms in the Gulf of Mexico. Field work for this project spanned the period 1993-1999. Federal regulations require removal of offshore structures within 1 year of lease termination. According to the NMFS Platform Removal Observer Programs' data, from 1989-1998 a total of 958 structures were removed using explosives. This includes all explosive removals in both federal and state waters of the Gulf of Mexico. The annual average of explosive removals is 95.8 or approximately 100. Explosive removals comprise approximately 64% of all removals that occur.

He described a typical offshore platform and discussed the most common removal method. The primary objectives were to estimate finfish mortality at explosive platform removals, estimate total annual mortality at U.S. Gulf of Mexico removals, and assess impacts on managed fishery stocks with special emphasis on the commercially and recreationally important red snapper. He detailed sampling protocol for determining these objectives.

Using sampling methods that changed as the study continued an estimated mortality and descriptive statistics were determined for the top four species: Atlantic spadefish, blue runner, red snapper, and sheepshead.

He discussed stock assessment analysis and methods. For the U. S. Gulf of Mexico, impacts of underwater explosives on red snapper are small, well within the variation of the current assessment, even when estimated mortality relating to explosive structure removals was doubled.

He pointed out some important facts that should be considered with these results. They had small sample size, only 9-10 out of approximately 4,000 platforms were studied. They studied primarily in shallow water platforms in depths less than 105 feet.

### **State Directors' Reports**

**Florida - V. Vail** submitted this report on behalf of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). The FWC's Sport Fish Health Monitoring program at the Florida Marine Research Institute received the 2002 American Fisheries Society Outstanding Research and Survey Sport Fish Restoration Project of the Year award; the award was presented at the annual meeting of the International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies in September 2003. The Fish Health group continues to develop health profiles of marine sport fish species being cultivated for stock

enhancement, study the impact of mercury on marine sport fish, investigate causes of lesions in marine sport fish, and respond to angler concerns and reports of fish kills and disease events.

The FWC Commission has been considering options for effort management in several fisheries. A ballyhoo permit was established and made available to approximately 21 fishers who qualified by harvesting at least the minimum requirement of 10,000 pounds of ballyhoo during a specified time period using a lampara net. A commercial spiny lobster dive permit, authorizing the holder to use SCUBA gear to harvest lobster, was established to be effective July 1, 2004; only those who have documented landings of spiny lobster by diving in 2002 or 2003 and do not hold trap certificates are eligible to receive this permit; the permit must be renewed annually or forfeited; anyone not holding the permit during the 2004/2005 fishing year will not be eligible to receive the permit until the Commission authorizes new participants in the fishery. A blue crab advisory panel, with 15 members representing various aspects of the blue crab fishery, was established to evaluate the fishery, identify problems and recommend management needs. Similar discussions for the Marine Life and shrimp fisheries are planned. Effort in the Marine Life and blue crab fisheries has been capped since 1998 when a moratorium was placed on the issuance of new endorsements required for participation in those fisheries and annual renewal of existing endorsements was required to maintain eligibility for the endorsement.

The 2003 Legislature enacted legislation that will facilitate enforcement of certain fisheries laws. With reference to the blue crab, stone crab and spiny lobster fisheries, "theft" was redefined to include the unauthorized taking of trap gear as well as the contents thereof and "molest" was defined as the touching, bothering, disturbing or tampering with a trap, line or buoy. Previously "theft" applied only to the taking of trap contents and "molesting" traps was illegal but not clearly defined. Penalties, criminal and civil, were established for the harvest, sale or purchase of saltwater products without possessing the required licenses. For repeat offenders, these are felony violations and the penalties include mandatory imprisonment, a civil penalty of up to \$5000, suspension of all license privileges, and forfeiture of property used in commission of the violation.

By rule, the FWC Commission clarified statutory prohibitions on possession and transport of illegal net gear across state waters. Possession of a gill or entangling net, any seine exceeding 500 square feet in mesh area, or any net with mesh greater than 2 inches stretched aboard an air boat or vessel less than 22 feet in length [25 feet if main power source is located forward of center] is prohibited. Transit while carrying such a net must be direct to/from a docking facility and lawful fishing area. Possession of more than four seines on one boat is prohibited, and any auxiliary vessel used to deploy/retrieve seines must be at least eight feet long and registered as a commercial vessel. By rule, the FWC Commission also approved more restrictive size and bag/possession limits to reduce pompano harvest by at least 10% after reviewing a stock assessment showing the fishery was both over fished and undergoing over fishing; these rules apply to the fishery in both state and federal waters.

The FWC Commission's reorganization plan is nearing completion; it will be presented to Legislators during their next session. The goal is more efficient, effective use of staff and funding resources to focus on the agency's core mission responsibilities as identified through discussions with stakeholders and staff.

Alabama - **S. Heath** submitted this report on behalf of Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR). He reported that the contract to construct a saltwater pipeline to supply water to the Claude Peteet Mariculture Center has been signed. Completion is planned for April 2004.

Dr. Steve Szedylemeyer, Auburn University, has tagged 400 of the juvenile red snapper produced at the Claude Peteet Mariculture with injected plastic elastomer and released them on a newly constructed artificial reef. He plans to release 1000 more in the near future.

The Alabama Mississippi Assessment Team (AMRAT) had a very successful event in Alabama Sept. 2 - 5, 2003. It was a tremendous example of interagency cooperation that included the Mobile Bay NEP, Alabama Marine Resources Division (AMRD), Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Weeks Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve, Gulf Coast Research Laboratory, NMFS Southeast Fisheries Center, Mississippi Dept. of Marine Resources, Auburn Marine Extension Service, Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant and FDA's Shellfish Lab. This project is designed to detect and catalog invasive species. A similar event will occur in Mississippi in the fall of 2004.

AMRD recently revised its commercial seafood reporting and landing regulation to better define and mandate the reporting requirements of both the fisherman and the dealer. Trip tickets must be completed within 72 hours after taking possession.

AMRD will begin taking additional information when issuing licenses in the upcoming fiscal year. This will include date of birth or date of incorporation and the Social Security number.

Mississippi - **C. Perret** submitted this report on behalf of the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources. He reported that there were 2 barges, 60 armored personnel carriers and approximately 5000 cubic yards of concrete rubble deployed in permitted offshore artificial reef areas. The Artificial Reef Program worked with the Derelict Vessel Program to deploy three derelict vessels in permitted reef sites. Approximately 160 nautical miles of habitat mapping was obtained using side scan data within the past 4 months.

Gill/trammel net license holders were added to the trip ticket program which now brings oyster, bait shrimp, hook and line commercial finfish to the trip ticket program. There have been 19 conventional and 7 fly fishing state records broken this past year.

From May 27 through June 20 the Shrimp and Crab Bureau interviewed 342 commercial shrimpers for the federal fisheries disaster relief fund. The qualification criteria was as follows; resident commercial shrimp license, a minimum of 5,000 pounds landed in Mississippi, or tax information showing at least 50% of ones income came from shrimping. There were 316 commercial shrimpers, 21 deckhands, and 5 related businesses that qualified for the disaster funds. There was a 1 week appeals process in which one shrimper qualified for the federal funds. The Shrimp and Crab Bureau received "Keep Mississippi Beautiful Award" from Keep America Beautiful and People Against Litter, and the Gulf Guardian Award in the Government category from the Gulf of Mexico Program for the Derelict Crab Trap Removal Program.

The oyster season closed on May 24, 2003. There were 391,635 sacks of oysters harvested for the 2002-2003 season. There was an oyster relay season for 15 days starting May 30 to allow the moving

of oysters from certain restricted waters to private lease areas. The Shellfish Program conducted a spring shell plant of 90 acres in the western Mississippi Sound. Currently we are working with Jackson State University and Veridian Systems Inc. on a computerized trip ticket and oyster tag program for the oyster check stations as well as an automated Oyster Management Program. The Shellfish Bureau received an \$89,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for the "Mississippi Sound Oyster Habitat Enhancement Project".

The Seafood Regulatory Program conducted a total of 1,843 regulatory and technical assistance activities from March to August 2003. There were 5 new Certified Mississippi Seafood Dealers. Reviewed and updated Mississippi Seafood Dealer's 2003 HACCP Plans and verification studies. They finished the water sampling, routine and follow-up inspections for MS permitted Oyster and Crab dealers.

Louisiana - **J. Roussel** submitted this report on behalf of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. The Louisiana Artificial Reef Initiative Committee, which is a group made up of state and federal regulatory agencies, academics, oil and gas representatives, conservation groups, and commercial and recreational fisher persons, has completed its review of our Artificial Reef Program. Its major recommendation which was ultimately endorsed by the Louisiana Artificial reef Council was to allow companies owning structures in water depths over 400 feet to participate in the program by donating structures which are configured with a minimum clearance of 85 ft but no more than 200 ft and which are 2 miles or more from a navigation fairway. Rather than being toppled in place these structures would be partially removed to meet the clearance criteria. The Department is also continuing to work with the various interest groups in explore opportunities to reconfigure our current reef planning areas in an effort to increase participation on our program.

Since the Commission's last meeting 10 more offshore reefs have been added to our program including one which involved a \$2.5 million dollar donation to the trust fund. We now have 121 reefs at 36 sites. Discussions and work on 18 more potential projects are currently underway.

The Louisiana legislature concluded its most recent session this past June and passed a number of fishery related bills including but not limited to the following:

- Legislation authorizing the Wildlife and Fisheries Commission to establish a crab trap removal program.
- Legislation decreasing the time in which crab fisherman are allowed to block crab trap escape rings. (excludes March)
- Legislation authorizing crabbers to retain a recreational limit of finfish excluding spotted seatrout and redfish.
- Legislation establishing a "Public Oyster Seed Ground Account" to receive compensation for oil and gas and other activities permitted to take place on the public oyster grounds.
- Legislation decreasing previously established reporting requirements for lease information to be used by the Department of Natural Resources in addressing conflicts between oyster leases and coastal restoration projects. Trip ticket information will be now used in lieu of the previously mandated reporting information.
- Legislation requiring a vessel monitoring system for those fishermen permitted to land oysters out of state.



- Legislation authorizing the purchase of a four year wholesale/retail license and a four year transport license for seafood.
- Legislation creating a certified commercial fisherman license for those persons demonstrating that they earned more than 50% of their income from commercial fishing.
- Legislation authorizing the placement of three constitutional amendments on the ballot with respect to coastal restoration.
  - Amendment 1 would let the state use at least \$35 million a year in mineral settlement money and other one time revenues to match federal dollars for coastal restoration.
  - Amendment 2 provides that if the state sells the remaining 40 percent of its tobacco settlement, it can use up to 20 percent of that money for coastal restoration, but only if the federal government matches that money.
  - Amendment 3 sets the state's liability for damages caused to private property from coastal restoration projects, based on the fair market value of that property.

All three amendments were approved by the voters in the October election.

The appeals process for distribution of the Federal Shrimp Fisheries Disaster Assistance Program money was recently completed and the payments will be mailed out by the second week of November. Approximately 3500 out of 5500 shrimp fishermen, who potentially qualified, completed the required acknowledgment forms and will receive payments ranging from just over \$100 to over \$3000. An additional \$1.1 million will be spent over the next three years for marketing of Louisiana wild caught shrimp and the development of a quality assurance program.

Texas - **M. Ray** submitted this report on behalf of Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD). He discussed the following:

Genetics and Life History Research - Genetic research continues on tarpon, blacktip and bonnet head sharks, shoal grass, menhaden, and spotted seatrout. Life History Research Team continues its collection of Atlantic croaker for a reproductive biology study, spotted seatrout hydro phone study, routine monitoring otolith collections and Cedar lakes resource monitoring.

Aquaculture Outreach and Inspection Program - Inspection team has inspected 1,844 pond samples and shrimp farmer self-submitted 82 pond samples. So far, the program reports with 100% compliance achieved and no viral disease found in Texas farm raised shrimp. A four exotic shrimp were captured in a routine TPWD trawl in the Arroyo Colorado near the effluent of two shrimp farms. Additional trawls did not produce more exotic shrimp and inspections of the farms full compliance with TPWD regulations.

Artificial Reef Project - April thru September, the Texas Artificial Reef Program received 5 reef donations totaling \$839,000. Another structure was reefed this month with a donation of \$190,650. The reef program will also get \$75,000 in SWG funding for marine research. An additional 73 quarry rocks were deployed at Basco's Reef off Sabine Lake.

Shrimp License Management Program - Texas' self-funded buyback program has reduced shrimp licenses by about 30%. By the end of this year, the number of shrimping licenses issued by TPWD could be about 2,000. In 1995, at the start of the program, TPWD issued 3,231 shrimping licenses. The program has been enhanced by funds generated through a \$3 surcharge on the saltwater fishing stamps required of recreational anglers fishing coastal water that took effect Sept. 1, 2000 and is set to expire Sept. 1, 2005. To date, TPWD has bought 1,005 commercial shrimping licenses, 522 bay shrimping licenses and 483 bait shrimping licenses, during 12 buy-back periods, representing 31% of the total number of bay and bait licenses that existed when the program started, at a cost of \$5.7 million.

Round 12 Update: 104 (54bay/50bait) were purchased, \$750,000 was spent; mean price paid was \$7,209 (range was \$2,300-\$9,500).

Overall Totals (through Round 12)

- 901 licenses bought back through Round 11 + 104 licenses bought back in Round 12 = 1005 total bait/bay licenses bought back.
- $3231 - 1005 = 2226$
- $1005/3231$  original licenses = 31%

Crab License Management Program - After three buyback rounds, TPWD has retired 21 crabbing licenses. About 220 commercial crabbing licenses remain in effect. During the latest round of license buybacks, TPWD paid \$30,999 to retire six commercial crabbing licenses.

Round 3

- 7 applications received
- 6 licenses accepted based on previous formula
- Total cost \$30,999 at an average of \$5,166
- Range from \$4,000 to \$6,000

Totals

- 21 licenses purchased
- \$95,499 total dollars spent
- avg. price over all three rounds = \$4,547

Commercial Finfish License Management Program - Round 3, TPWD purchased 20 finfish licenses for \$97,140. The average price paid was \$4857. The range was \$4000 - \$5000.

To date, 68 finfish licenses have been purchased for \$30,680. The program average is \$4501. The Department has purchased 12% of the licenses issued the first year of the program.

Oyster Lease Management Program - Texas Oyster Advisory Committee addressed 2 issues related to the management of the oyster fishery, including License Management (Limited Entry) and enforceability of the two-dredge rule. Oyster leaseholders/agents agreed to allow 2 transplant boats to each lease, which is different from the way the industry had been operating since 1999.

New Regulations - In an action aimed at enhancing fishing in Texas without restricting angling opportunity, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Commission adopted a rule change that establishes a daily bag "boat limit" on guided trips. The new regulation affects "for hire" guided fishing trips only and establishes the daily bag limit for all species based on the number of customers onboard. A guide can still catch fish and retain his catch, but the overall bag limit for his vessel cannot exceed the combined bag limits of the customers. A companion change to the boat limit restriction designed to bolster spotted seatrout fishing will cap the maximum length limit at 25 inches, with anglers

allowed to retain only one trout longer than 25 inches per day. In addition, the Commission approved an increase in the guide permit fees. For guides working in both salt and freshwater, the fee is \$200. The fee for guides working only in freshwater is \$125. Fishing guides working in salt water will also be required to possess a U.S. Coast Guard proficiency certification as a for-hire captain. All rules took effect September 1, 2003.

Sea Turtles - Mike Ray met with the other members of a bi-national team of sea turtle biologists and fisheries managers in Tamaulipas, Mexico from June 10-15 to work on the Kemp's ridley recovery plan. The Mexican equivalent of the Secretary of the Interior and the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service were also there and assured the group of the strong commitment that both governments have for the Kemp's ridley recovery effort. Members began working on the plan in the fall of 2002, a process that will take approximately 3 years to complete. The good news is the Kemp's ridley population continues to rebound. The number of nests for the current season has exceeded 8,000, which is the most nesting sites recorded since conservation efforts began three decades ago.

Shrimp Disaster Relief Funds - Texas commercial gulf and bay shrimpers impacted by increasing imports and decreasing prices for shrimp in recent years are sharing \$5.5 million in federal disaster relief funds that are being administered by TPWD's CF. State and federal officials finalized details of the direct assistance program recently with input from shrimp industry stakeholders. Check are expected to be issued in November 2003.

Administration - The Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Commission voted to increase most hunting and fishing license and boat registration fees. The cost of senior and youth license types did not increase. Hunting and fishing license as well as boat fee changes took effect September 1. The boat registration fee increase is expected to generate an additional \$3.6 million per year. Hunting and fishing fee increases are projected to bring in an additional \$10.2 million per year. This money will allow the agency to keep providing basic services. The cost of a Super Combo license will increase this fall from \$49 to \$59. Resident hunting and resident fishing licenses will go from \$19 to \$23. Licenses for youth and seniors will not increase. Also for the first time since 1996, fees for two-year boat registration will increase by amounts between \$5 and \$15 depending on the size and type of vessel. Compared with this time last year, license sales are up about 3.3 percent, which translates to 1.2 million licenses sold and \$5.8 million in increased revenue at this point in the license year.

Perry R. Bass Marine Fisheries Research Lab sustained \$400,000 in damages from Hurricane Claudette. Two residences are being demolished and replaced. Several other structures are also being repaired.

Hal Osburn retired the end of August and moved to a homestead in North Central New Mexico. Hal's position has not been announced and may not be filled for several months.

### Future Meetings

**G. Herring** reported that she had entered into a contract with Holiday Inn - Chateau LeMoyne, New Orleans, Louisiana for March 15-18, 2004.

**B. Hewes and W. Blessey suggested G. Herring submit a request for proposals to all casino hotels for the October 18-21, 2004 meeting.**

**Election of Chairman**

**C. Perret nominated B. Hewes for Chairman of the Commission. J. Roussel seconded. B. Hewes was unanimously elected Chairman for 2003-2004.**

**C. Perret nominated J. Roussel for Vice Chairman of the Commission. M. Ray seconded. J. Roussel was unanimously elected Vice Chairman for 2003-2004.**

**S. Heath nominated V. Vail for 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chairman of the Commission. W. Ward seconded. V. Vail was unanimously elected 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice Chairman for 2003-2004.**

***There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:45 pm.***

APPROVED BY:  
*Ronald R. Lukens*  
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN  
4/1/2004

**GULF OF MEXICO REGIONAL PANEL ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES  
MINUTES**

**Monday and Tuesday, October 20-21, 2003  
New Orleans, Louisiana**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Ron Lukens called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm and began the meeting with introductions of the Panel members and guests. The following were in attendance:

**Attendees**

Phil Bass, Mississippi DEQ, Jackson, MS  
Earl Chilton, TPWD, Austin, TX  
Alfred F. Cofrancesco, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Vicksburg, MS  
Vincent F. Cottone, Chevron/Texaco, New Orleans, LA  
Dale Diaz, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Pam Fuller, USGS, Gainesville, FL  
Leslie Hartman, AL Marine Resources Division, Dauphin Island, AL  
Thomas L. Herrington, FDA/GOMP, Stennis Space Center, MS  
William D. Holland, Stennis Space Center, MS  
Jan Hoover, USACE, Vicksburg, MS  
Jim Kruse, Texas Sea Grant Program, Houston, TX  
Herb Kumpf, At-Large Member, Panama City, FL  
Jim Long, National Park Service, Atlanta, GA  
Mark McElroy, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA  
Roberto Mendoza, UANL, Mexico  
John E. Meyers, U.S. Coast Guard, New Orleans, LA  
Marilyn O'Leary, Louisiana Sea Grant Program, Baton Rouge, LA  
Richard Orr, NISC, Washington, DC  
Harriet Perry, CFRD/GCRL/USM, Ocean Springs, MS  
Cynthia Sarthou, Gulf Restoration Network, New Orleans, LA  
Don C. Schmitz, FDEP, Tallahassee, FL  
Joe Starinchak, USFWS, Arlington, VA  
John Teem, Florida Department of Agriculture/Division of Aquaculture, Tallahassee, FL  
W. Jay Troxel, USFWS, Atlanta, GA  
David W. Yeager, Mobile Bay National Estuary Program, Mobile, AL

**Staff**

Ronald R. Lukens, Assistant Director, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Nancy K. Marcellus, Administrative Assistant, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

At this time Lukens asked if there were any members of the public that wished to address the Panel. There were no requests by the public to speak.

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## **REVIEW AND ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

The following changes to the agenda were presented:

- Joe Starinchak's presentation "National Outreach and Education Program" will be moved to today's 2:00 pm time slot.
- Leslie Hartman's presentation "Mobile Bay Rapid Assessment Project" will be given by Harriet Perry.
- Al Cofrancesco's presentation "U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Report on Armored Catfish" will be given by Jan Hoover at 10:00 am Tuesday.
- At 1:30 pm on Tuesday Earl Chilton's report will include water spinach and a Rio Grand update.

**A motion to adopt the agenda with the changes listed above was made by Herb Kumpf. The motion was seconded by Marilyn O'Leary and unanimously adopted.**

## **ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT**

2004 Grant Agreement - In September 2002, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission began administration of the Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species (Gulf Regional Panel), under the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force, authorized by the Non-Indigenous Aquatic Nuisance Protection and Control Act of 1990. The 2004 Grant Agreement (October 1, 2003 - December 31, 2004) for administration of the Gulf Regional Panel has been submitted and approved. The Gulf Regional Panel is supported by 2 grants since it also receives funding in the amount of \$40-50,000 from the Sport Fish Restoration Program grant.

Mexico Membership - The Panel discussed offering Mexico membership on the Gulf Regional Panel. Chilton also mentioned the possibility of adding a government representative from Mexico to the Panel membership.

**Marilyn O'Leary made a motion to invite Roberto Mendoza as a voting member of the Panel representing Mexico. Earl Chilton seconded the motion, and the motion passed.**

Regarding the second seat for Mexico, Marilyn suggested that Chilton speak to government representatives and see if they are working on invasive species in the Gulf of Mexico. **A motion was made by Cynthia Sarthou to add the second seat for a government representative from Mexico. Chilton seconded the motion. Without objection it was so ordered.** Lukens is to find out from Sharon Gross if there is a process to follow regarding international participation.

Mississippi DEQ Membership - Since the Governor of Mississippi named DEQ as the lead agency in Mississippi for invasive species, the Panel discussed adding MS DEQ as a voting member of the Panel. **Dale Diaz made the motion and was seconded by Harriet Perry to add MS DEQ as a voting member of the Gulf Regional Panel. The motion carried.**

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Panel Operating Procedures - A copy of the Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species Standard Operating Procedures were distributed to the Panel for adoption. A motion was made by Herb Kumpf and seconded by David Yeager to adopt the Standard Operating Procedures. The motion passed unanimously and the Standard Operating Procedures were adopted.

Vice-chairman Issue - Lukens noted that the Panel vice-chairman, Tom McIlwain, has retired from federal service and will no longer be a member on the Panel. Election of a new vice-chairman will be handled under "Other Business." The term is for 2 years with reconsideration after 2 years.

## **NATIONAL OUTREACH AND EDUCATION PROGRAM**

Joe Starinchak, FWS, Outreach Coordinator for ANS Task Force and FWS National Outreach and Education Program gave a presentation on their national outreach and education program. The purpose of this presentation was to provide an overview of how this issue has been addressed at a national level.

Starinchak reviewed the national campaign "Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers!" The primary sponsors of the campaign are the national Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Task Force, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Coast Guard. Campaign sponsors will use a variety of means, such as public service announcements, stickers, posters, magazine and newspaper articles, television and radio programs to make the public aware of this issue. A web site called "Protect Your Waters" ([www.protectyourwaters.net](http://www.protectyourwaters.net)) has been developed for recreational users who want to help stop aquatic nuisance species.

Richard Orr of the National Invasive Species Council reported that the Council added 2 new staff positions (his and a secretary), and a 3<sup>rd</sup> position for education and outreach will be advertised in 2-3 months. He is working with the Council and ISAC to rewrite the National Plan.

Ron distributed the agenda for the ANS Task Force Meeting to be held in Arlington, Virginia on November 4-5, 2003. New plans up for approval include Hawaii, Indiana, and Wisconsin. There is also a proposal for a new Mid-Atlantic Regional Panel (approval by ANSTF).

## **STATUS OF NISA REAUTHORIZATION**

Lukens indicated that the NAISA bills (H.R. 1080, 1081, and S. 525) are stalled, and there is not likely to be any movement in the process until 2004. He stated that private property rights were an issue with some western Congressmen and Senators, and ballast water regulations were still an issue with the shipping industry.

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## **REVIEW OF SOUTHEAST AQUATIC RESOURCES PARTNERSHIP ANS PLAN**

Lukens reviewed the Southeast Aquatic Resources Partnership (SARP) ANS Plan. The SARP Mission Statement states "...With partners, protect, conserve and restore aquatic resources, including habitats, throughout the Southeast for the continuing benefit, use and enjoyment of the American people." This will be accomplished through coordinated management and advocacy.

SARP issue areas include public use, fishery mitigation, imperiled fish and aquatic species recovery, interjurisdictional fisheries, aquatic habitat conservation, and aquatic nuisance species.

The ANS goal statement is to prevent and control the impact of invasive species. ANS Objectives include:

- prevent new aquatic nuisance species introductions in the Southeast
- eradicate new aquatic invasive species, when possible
- limit the spread of existing aquatic invasive species in the Southeast
- identify needed ongoing actions crucial to achieving the goal
  - monitoring and detection of aquatic invasive species
  - data and information management
  - education and outreach (public and agencies)
  - research and development.

The next steps are to recognize other activities ongoing (Regional Panel and others), implement as much as possible with existing resources, and to seek new funding (IAFWA grant).

## **WORK GROUP REPORTS**

Information Management Work Group - Lukens reported that the work group is working on the web site Non-Native Aquatic Species in the Gulf of Mexico Region. The work group has had one conference call and a meeting at the USGS office in Gainesville, Florida to talk about the web site development. The Panel has ownership of the website. Included on the web site is a Map of the Gulf; What's New; New Invasions; Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species; What is an invasive species?; Species of the Month; Kid's Corner; What's in my state?; Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers; as well as links to other sites. The work group asked the Panel for permission to launch the site and make it available to the public.

O'Leary suggested that before the site is launched, make sure everything is ready. Do not put "under construction" sections on the site. She added that perhaps a Panel button could be added to areas that would only be accessible to the Panel via password.



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## **MINUTES**

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Don Schmitz also suggested a public friendly section. Cynthia Sarthou added that the public friendly section could be offered first with a link to more technical sections of website. Lukens concluded that these issues should first be resolved within the work group.

Education and Outreach Work Group - Marilyn O'Leary reported that the membership to the work group has been named. The work group has worked very hard and conducted an informal survey on what is going on in the Gulf region.

The work group is developing a science fair protocol to raise the consciousness of the entire science community. Jim Long and Chuck Jacoby have done the majority of the work on it.

A work group meeting will be held Wednesday at 8:30 am. Topics of discussion include the possibility of developing an identification pamphlet for the regional panel, development of a Kid's Corner, possibility of a regional panel newsletter, discuss the adoption of the logo for aquatic hitchhikers, and language on the website

Research and Development Work Group - Harriet Perry indicated that the first meeting of the work group will be on Wednesday. They have held one conference call. If any Panel members are interested in research and development, the meeting will start at 8:00 am. The primary goal will be to set some research priorities.

Early Detection/Rapid Response Work Group - Lukens reported that no chairman has been named for the work group. The dates of December 11-12 have been discussed for a possible meeting. \$20,000 is available to spend on workshops or whatever is needed to develop a rapid response plan.

The floor was again opened for public comment. No public comment was given.

## **INVASIVE SPECIES IN MEXICO**

Roberto Mendoza from the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo Leon in Mexico gave a detailed presentation reviewing invasive species in Mexico. Several Panel members expressed an interest in receiving a copy of the presentation. Mendoza said he would give a copy to Lukens for distribution to Panel members.

## **RISK ASSESSMENTS: A TOOL FOR EVALUATING NON-NATIVE SPECIES**

Richard Orr gave the presentation "Introduction to Risk Analysis for Determining the Invasiveness of, and Appropriate Response to, Non-Native Aquatic Species."

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### **Definitions:**

**Risk** - Is the likelihood and magnitude of an adverse event.

**Risk Assessment** - The estimation of risk

**Risk Management** - The pragmatic decision-making process concerned with what to do about the risk.

**Risk Analysis** - The process that includes both risk assessment and risk management.

The Risk Assessment and Management (RAM) Committee was initiated by, and is under the auspices of, the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force. The Task Force was created for the purpose of developing a strategy in which the appropriate government agencies could meet the goals of the Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990. The Task Force was "...established to coordinate governmental efforts related to nonindigenous aquatic species in the United States with those of the private sector and other North American interests". The Task Force is co-chaired by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The Generic Nonindigenous Aquatic Organisms Risk Analysis Review Process is the risk process developed through the RAM committee to help meet the requirements of the Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act. The objective of the Review Process is to provide a standardized process for evaluating the risk of introducing nonindigenous organisms into a new environment and, if needed, determining the correct risk management steps needed to mitigate that risk.

The Review Process provides a framework where scientific, technical, and other relevant information can be organized into a format that is understandable and useful to managers and decision makers. The Review Process was developed to function as an open process with early and continuous input from all identified interested parties. It was designed to be flexible and dynamic enough to accommodate a variety of approaches to nonindigenous organism risk depending on the available resources, accessibility of the biological information, and the risk assessment methods available at the time of the assessment. The Review Process may be used as a purely subjective evaluation or be quantified to the extent possible or necessary depending on the needs of the analysis. The process will accommodate a full range of methodologies from a simple and quick judgmental process to an analysis requiring extensive research and sophisticated technologies.

In addition to numerous projects and other pertinent work, the following quality criteria were used in designing the Review Process:

**Comprehensive** - the assessment should review the subject in detail and identify sources of uncertainty in data extrapolation and measurement errors. The assessment should evaluate the quality of its own conclusions. The assessment should be flexible to accommodate new information.

**Logically Sound** - the risk assessment should be up-to-date and rational, reliable, justifiable, unbiased, and sensitive to different aspects of the problem.

**Practical** - a risk assessment should be commensurate with the available resources.

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Conducive to Learning - the risk assessment should have a broad enough scope to have carry-over value for similar assessments. The risk assessment should serve as a model or template for future assessments.

Open to Evaluation - the risk assessment should be recorded in sufficient detail and be transparent enough in its approach that it can be reviewed and challenged by qualified independent reviewers.

The ultimate goal of the process is to produce quality risk assessments on specific nonindigenous aquatic organisms or with nonindigenous organisms identified as being associated with specific pathways. The assessments should strive for theoretical accuracy while remaining comprehensible and manageable; and the scientific and other data should be collected, organized and recorded in a formal and systematic manner.

The assessment should be able to provide a reasonable estimation of the overall risk. All assessment should communicate effectively the relative amount of uncertainty involved and, if appropriate, provide recommendations for mitigation measures that reduce the risk.

Caution is required to ensure that the process clearly explains the uncertainties inherent in the process and to avoid design and implementation of a process that reflects a predetermined result. Quantitative risk assessments can provide valuable insight and understanding; however, such assessments can never capture all the variables. Quantitative and qualitative risk assessments should always be buffered with careful human judgment.

If all were certain, there would not be a need for risk assessment. Uncertainty, as it relates to the individual risk assessment, can be divided into three distinct types:

- a) uncertainty of the process - (methodology)
- b) uncertainty of the assessor(s) - (human error)
- c) uncertainty about the organism - (biological and environmental unknowns).

Each one of these presents its own set of problems. All three types of uncertainty will continue to exist regardless of future developments. The goal is to succeed in reducing the uncertainty in each of these groups as much as possible.

The "uncertainty of the process" requires that the risk methodologies involved with the Review Process never become static or routine but continue to be modified when procedural errors are detected and/or new risk methodologies are developed.

Some of the information used in performing a risk assessment is scientifically defensible, some of it is anecdotal or based on experience, and all of it is subject to the filter or perception. After Orr's presentation, Lukens mentioned pursuing the possibility of having a risk assessment workshop or conference.

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## **U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS REPORT ON ARMORED CATFISH**

Jan Hoover from the Vicksburg Waterways Experiment Station in Vicksburg, Mississippi gave the presentation "Suckermouth Catfishes - Threats to Aquatic Ecosystems of the United States?"

In appearance and in habitats, the suckermouth catfishes or "plecos" of South and Central America are markedly different from the bullhead catfishes of North America. With more than 550 species, suckermouth catfishes constitute the largest family of catfishes in the world. Popular with home aquarists because of their distinctive appearance, hardiness, and propensity for cleaning algae from all submerged surfaces, suckermouth catfishes have been commonly imported into the United States since the mid-20th century, and the number of taxa imported has increased during recent decades. Consequently, it is not easy, at present, to precisely identify specimens of suckermouth catfishes when they are found in U.S. waters.

The distinctive feeding and reproductive behaviors of suckermouth catfishes, coupled with large size and high population densities, constitute significant threats to native fish communities and to aquatic habitats of the United States. Potential and documented impacts of suckermouth catfishes include: disruption of aquatic food chains; impacts to native species; mortality of endangered shore birds; changes in aquatic plant communities; and bank erosion. Suckermouth catfishes present a cumulative series of threats to aquatic ecosystems unprecedented in recent history.

In the early 1990s, bighead and silver carp were viewed largely as a localized and innocuous phenomenon of the lower Mississippi Basin. Little effort was made to study, contain, and manage those species. Today they threaten the upper Mississippi Basin and the Great Lakes. In recent years, suckermouth catfishes have appeared in a greater number of locations and in greater taxonomic diversity than ever before. Failure to promptly contain and manage them could result in a similar range expansion with potential for disastrous environmental consequences. To effectively control these species, innovative barriers, management techniques, and public awareness programs are required.

## **MONITORING AND DETECTION OF CAULERPA TAXIFOLIA IN FLORIDA**

John Teem gave the following overview of monitoring and detection of *caulerpa taxifolia* in Florida:

### **Caulerpa taxifolia**

- marine macroalgae from South Pacific, coastal Australia, also native to Caribbean
- used as an aquarium plant in Europe and North America
- aquarium plant was likely source of infestation in Mediterranean
- in the Mediterranean, *Caulerpa* (Mediterranean clone) overgrows other plants, altering the ecosystem
- introduction detected at Carlsbad CA in 2001

# GULF OF MEXICO REGIONAL PANEL ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES

## MINUTES

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### Invasive Characteristics

- grows fast on different substrates
- reproduces by vegetative fragmentation
- tolerates variable temperature and salinity regimes
- lacks predators, produces toxin that discourages grazing by sea urchins

### Monitoring Program

- must be supported on a low budget
- must provide a cost-effective survey of areas of highest risk
- must have capability to detect invasive *C. taxifolia* and distinguish it from native *Caulerpa* species.

Teem offered that if anyone has anything they would like to have analyzed, to send it to him.

## STATUS OF STATE PLANS

Louisiana - McElroy reported that Louisiana is getting close to finalizing its plan. A meeting is scheduled next week to look at an implementation table and what kind of body, person, or group do they want when the plan is finalized to work with the different entities on implementation. They have received a lot of support from the current Governor and have 29 members on their Task Force. The election for a new governor is approaching and the Plan must be signed by the Governor for the ANS to approve it as a state plan.

Mississippi - Phil Bass reported that Governor Musgrove named the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality as the lead agency in Mississippi to develop the plan. Their agency has no regulatory authority for invasive species. They are talking to the Department of Agriculture to work on the plan as a cooperative effort. One meeting has been held and a second meeting is planned for Thursday. They are inviting other agencies to participate in the plan development, and current plans are to contract with someone to write the plan.

Texas - Earl Chilton reported that Texas does not have an Executive Order. They are the only agency in the state that regulates exotic species. Plans are to do an initial first draft and then call in other state agencies to review the plan. They hope to submit their plan to the ANS Task Force within a year.

Florida - Don Schmitz reported that after 2 years the Governor has endorsed the Statewide Invasive Species Strategic Plan for Florida. They are in the process of finalizing an MOU between 10 agencies and universities. The Plan is out for federal review and federal comments are due December 19. After the federal review it should be ready to forward to the ANS Task Force. The next working group meeting is November 21, and they will find out then when the plan will be forwarded to the Task Force (probably mid-January).

## **GULF OF MEXICO REGIONAL PANEL ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES MINUTES**

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Lukens noted that when plans are forwarded to the ANS Task Force, they must be under cover letter signed by the Governor of the respective state. Before formal submission, Ron can forward a copy of the state plan to the ANS Task Force for a preliminary review so they can look through it and make sure everything is there for approval. Then they will send it back to the state so it can be signed by the Governor for formal submission. Once it is signed by the Governor, it is final and would be hard to change after the fact.

Plans must be approved by ANS Task Force to be eligible to financial support.

Alabama - A lead agency for invasive species in Alabama has not been identified at this time. Lukens mentioned the possibility of resubmitting the original letter to the new Governor.

### **TWO PROBLEMATIC AREAS IN TEXAS**

Earl Chilton reported on water spinach in Houston area. A sting operation was conducted at warehouses and grocery stores. They have also held public hearings with Cambodian growers and Vietnamese (Cambodians grow it and Vietnamese buy it). They are concerned about the growth rate and the fact that it also grows from fragments. It has been growing in the Houston area for a number of years and does not appear to have escaped, even after numerous floodings, but they will continue to look. At this time they are not planning to take it off the prohibited list yet, but may be issuing permits for growing.

Regarding water hyacinth in the Rio Grande, they are working with biological controls and mechanical controls since they are reticent to use pesticides in the river. Water lettuce is in river now and this year is the first time to see alligatorweed in the river. They have also found Lyngbya growing in the river this year. *Arundo donax* is another problem with the growing concern of water loss.

Asian carp identification cards were distributed to the Panel. The cards were produced by Illinois-Indiana Sea Grant, Illinois Natural History Survey, Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for the Great Lakes Sea Grant Network. Contact Jay Troxel or Pat Carter if interested in large numbers of the cards for distribution.

### **ALABAMA - MISSISSIPPI RAPID ASSESSMENT TEAM (AMRAT)**

David Yeager and Harriet Perry reported on "AMRAT Mobile Bay September 2-5, 2003" which consisted of 15 sampling sites.

# **GULF OF MEXICO REGIONAL PANEL ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES MINUTES**

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## Rapid Assessment Process

-Field collections and observations

-sample accession

-sample analysis

54 species of fish

32 species of molluscs

58 species of arthropods

19 species of annelids

10 miscellaneous

19 species of algae

204 species of plants

2 new molluscs

1 dead Asian clam

1 "lost" Permit

## Some statistics

60 + participants

9 boats

+ newspapers, 5 TV stations, 1 radio station

Schmitz inquired whether they had anything written on the procedures and plans used. Yeager replied that he could get it and that it was patterned after assessments done in Naragansett Bay and San Francisco.

## **STATUS OF SEA GRANT LINE ITEM IN NOAA BUDGET**

Lukens reported that he contacted Dorn Carlson regarding federal funding for invasive species work and the status of the '04 Sea Grant budget. Carlson replied via e-mail (copy in folder) that Sea Grant invasive species funding (the funding that supports the projects that won in the national competition earlier this year) looks stable. Ballast water is a complete unknown to him. The \$20K for regional rapid response planning may be stable at 2003 levels.

## **A PROPOSAL TO ESTABLISH A TAXONOMIC REGISTRY SUBCOMMITTEE**

Don Schmitz presented a proposal to establish a taxonomic registry subcommittee who will develop a database that includes information about university, government, and non-government organization personnel involved in the identification of non-native species for the entire Gulf state region of the United States. Accurate taxonomic identifications are the foundation of any rapid response effort.

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Using surveys, the subcommittee will identify key personnel for specific taxa and/or groups of species. The result will be a searchable Internet database and the establishment of a taxonomic network with which anyone can rapidly identify experts for all taxa found in the Gulf region and be able to send unknown species to them for quick identification.

The survey results will be compiled into a database by the subcommittee and the resulting database will be posted on the Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species website using existing web interface platforms and available personnel. The proposed Internet registry and database will enable Gulf state technical personnel to find taxonomic scientists easily. In addition, citizens, such as fishermen and outdoorsmen, who observe what appears to be a new introduction, cannot easily find out whom to contact about identifying a suspect species, and valuable opportunities to contain or eradicate a harmful species are often missed. To avoid overloading the network with identification requests that aren't really necessary, a gateway will be established through which such non-governmental requests would first interact with the network for screening purposes.

To carry out the survey and follow-ups, the subcommittee will develop a survey form, and working with the Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel on Aquatic Invasive Species members, the subcommittee will perform the initial research to find all of the agencies and universities potentially involved with non-native species identifications. Once the key personnel are identified, they will be contacted by e-mail or phone and be asked if they want to become part of this network of taxonomists. Those that agree will become official members of the Gulf of Mexico Regional Panel Aquatic Invasive Species Taxonomic Network and receive a framed document recognizing their official membership and area of expertise. Also, the survey will identify those taxa for which little or no taxonomic expertise exists in the Gulf region. And, from that, the subcommittee can seek experts outside of the Gulf region who might be called on for such assistance as is needed.

Lukens agreed that it would be a good idea to establish a taxonomic work group. Harriet Perry expressed an interest in working with that group. The Panel agreed with this concept and it was decided that Schmitz would chair the work group and Perry would serve as vice chair. It was mentioned that it would be helpful to have representation from each of the states.

### **NEXT MEETING**

The consensus of the Panel was to hold the next meeting the week of March 29, 2004 in Orange Beach, Alabama or San Antonio, Texas.

### **OTHER BUSINESS**

Jay Troxel mentioned the possibility of considering adding the states of North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia to the GOM Regional Panel membership. It was suggested that Lukens confer with Sharon Gross to investigate if these states would be interested in joining the Gulf Panel. A



**GULF OF MEXICO REGIONAL PANEL ON AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES  
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**motion was made by Tom Herrington to pursue the concept of adding these three states to the Panel membership. Herb Kumpf seconded the motion.**

Schmitz indicated that he would like more information before agreeing to this since the states now involved have the Gulf of Mexico in common.

**It was clarified that the motion is just for Lukens to explore the issue. The motion passed.**

**Election of vice-chair - Harriet Perry made the motion to nominate David Yeager to hold the position of vice-chairman of the Panel. The motion was seconded by Tom Herrington. Marilyn O'Leary moved to close the nominations and was seconded by Cynthia Sarthou. There being no further nominations, Yeager was elected to the position of vice-chairman.**

Herb Kumpf suggested that the Panel sponsor a symposium on the status of invasive species in the Gulf of Mexico. The Panel decided to formulate a work group to work on this task. Kumpf will chair that work group. Schmitz agreed to join the work group and it was suggested that there be at least one representative from each state. Contact Herb by November 15 if you are willing to serve on the work group. A steering group will compile some dates to hold the symposium.

Before the meeting adjourned, Lukens again provided the opportunity for public comment. No comments were received.

***There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:30 pm.***

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

## **SHEEPSHEAD TECHNICAL TASK FORCE MINUTES**

**October 27-28, 2003**

**New Orleans, Louisiana**

S. VanderKooy called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. He announced that Mike Jepson (FL) has agreed to assist the group with the sociology section. Due to a conflict, he was unable to attend this meeting but plans to attend the next session. It was pointed out that the commercial representative, Simon Zirlott, has not attended either meeting. VanderKooy will inquire as to his intentions. Further, VanderKooy explained that the only representative who does not necessarily have to attend during the early stages is the enforcement representative. Attendance was as follows:

### Members Attending:

Chuck Adams, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL  
Jason Adriance, LDWF, Grand Isle, LA  
Mike Brackin, Breakaway Fishing, Gulfport, MS  
Paul Cook, LDWF, New Iberia, LA  
John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL  
Erick Porche, Jr., MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Andy Strelcheck, FWC, Tallahassee, FL  
Perry Trial, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX

### Members Absent:

Jeff Mayne, LDWF Enforcement Division, Baton Rouge, LA  
Simon Zirlott, Commercial Representative, Coden, AL

### Guests:

Manuel Ruiz, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA

### Staff:

Steven J. VanderKooy, IJF Coordinator, Ocean Springs, MS  
Cynthia B. Yocom, IJF Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, MS

### Adoption of Agenda

C. Adams moved to adopt the agenda was presented. P. Cook seconded the motion, which passed by consensus.

### Election of Chairman

S. VanderKooy opened the floor for nominations. Hearing none, C. Adams volunteered to chair the group. The group unanimously agreed and thanked Adams for his willingness to serve.

### Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held July 22, 2003, in New Orleans, Louisiana, were reviewed. J. Mareska moved to approve the minutes as written. P. Trial seconded the motion, which passed by consensus.

### General Discussion

The draft to date was reviewed thoroughly by the group. The following action items were noted:

J. Mareska will check on subspecies information by habitat type via AFS materials.

A. Strelcheck will send E. Porche information on fish health from FMRI files.

P. Cook will flesh-out his bulleted section to text form.

P. Cook will send Southwick Report to C. Adams for use in recreational subsection of Section 7.

E. Porche will write sections 3.2.1.2.5, 3.2.4, and 3.2.5.

J. Mayne will coordinate with LE to complete Section 5 (TX, AL, MS). Add web site links to rules and regulation section.

J. Adriance will draft Section 6 and send to S. VanderKooy as soon as possible. (Each committee member needs to send J. Adriance any historical info on the sheepshead fishery.) Include number of licenses sold per state.

A. Strelcheck will send Steve Vanderkooy/Perry Trial recent information from Florida on sheepshead genetics and age and growth.

C. Adams will finish Section 7.

- Will contact Randy Blakenship in Brownsville, TX about imports from Mexico
- Will contact Steve and Cindy about doing a dealer survey
- Will send email to all committee members about civil restitution info for each state
- Will send request to all members about info on recreational fishery for sheepshead
- Send S. VanderKooy an electronic version of Section 7

M. Jepson will begin work on Section 8. C. Adams will contact with reminder.

M. Ruiz volunteered to look for information on the culture of Sheepshead.

S. VanderKooy will send MRFSS data reports to C. Adams for use in completing Section 7.

S. VanderKooy will contact Page Campbell (TX) regarding creel survey information for sheepshead for use in Section 6.

Review of Assignments/Deadlines

C. Yocom will send the committee action items as soon as possible. **The next draft is due to the Commission office on Friday, January 23, 2003.** S. VanderKooy will distribute the next revision to the task force on January 30, 2003.

Next Meeting

The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for the week of February 9, 2004, in Pensacola Beach, Florida.

**There being no further business, P. Trial moved to adjourn. P. Cook seconded, and the meeting ended at 10:15 a.m.**

**Port Sampler Meeting  
Meeting Summary  
November 5 and 6, 2003  
Miami, Florida**

David Donaldson of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission called the port sampler meeting to order on November 5, 2003 at 9:00 a.m. The following were present:

Pete Antosh, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Chuck Armstrong, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Laura Baird, FFWCC, Melbourne, FL  
Debbie Batiste, NMFS, New Orleans, LA  
Rick Beaver, FFWCC, Marathon, FL  
David Bennett, TPWD, Highland, TX  
Josh Bennett, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Chris Bohnsack, FFWCC, Tequesta, FL  
Jay Boulet, NMFS, Chalmette, LA  
Beth Bourgeois, NMFS, New Iberia, LA  
Maggie Bourgeois, NMFS, New Orleans, LA  
Pamela Brown Eyo, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Steve Brown, FFWCC, St. Petersburg, FL  
Lew Bullock, FFWCC, St. Petersburg, FL  
Graham Cole, FFWCC, Jacksonville, FL  
Guy Davenport, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Claudia Dennis, NMFS, New Smyrna Beach, FL  
Chris Denson, AMRD, Gulf Shores, AL  
Aimee Eschete, LDWF, Grand Isle, LA  
Justin Esslinger, TPWD, Rockport, TX  
Noel Estes, ADCNR, Dauphin Island, AL  
Debbie Fable, NMFS, Panama City, FL  
Ted Flowers, NMFS, Mobile, AL  
Michelle Gamby, NMFS, Tequesta, FL  
Linda Guidry, NMFS, Lafayette, LA  
Gary Haddle, FFWCC, Jacksonville, FL  
Lisa Hallock, FFWCC, Port Charlotte, FL  
Chad Hanson, FFWCC, East Point, FL  
Brett Hano, LDWF, New Orleans, LA  
Kathleen Hebert, NMFS, Houma, LA  
Tom Herbert, NMFS, Fort Myers, FL  
Rene Labadens, NMFS, Pascagoula, MS  
Jude LeDoux, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Ed Little, NMFS, Key West, FL  
Linda Lombardi, NMFS, Panama City, FL  
Edie Lopez, NMFS, Brownsville, TX  
Pamela Machuga, NMFS, Key West, FL  
Anthony MacWhinnie, FFWCC, Pensacola, FL

Vanessa Maxwell, FFWCC, Marathon, FL  
Lloyd Muccio, NMFS, Miami, FL  
Michelle Padgett, NMFS, Freeport, TX  
Keith Roberts, NMFS, Galveston, TX  
Renee Roman, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Gary Rousse, NMFS, Golden Meadow, LA  
Jimmy Sanders, MDMR, Biloxi, MS  
Charlie Schaefer, NMFS, Tequesta, FL  
Jan Simpson, NMFS, New Orleans, LA  
Roy Spears, NMFS, Aransas Pass, TX  
Mandy Strano, LDWF, Lake Charles, LA  
June Weeks, NMFS, Panama City Beach, FL  
Robert Wiggers, SCDNR, Charleston, SC

**Staff**

Dave Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS  
Madeleine Travis, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

**Approval of Agenda**

The agenda was approved as presented.

**Training Session for TIP Online Data Entry Program**

G. Davenport and J. Bennett of NMFS Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) welcomed the port samplers. Bennett explained the new features of TIPONLINE as well as modifications and improvements. L. Muccio discussed minimum requirements for using TIPONLINE. After a question and answer session, the remainder of the day was spent with all federal and state port samplers being given the opportunity for hands on data entry training using TIPONLINE.

**The meeting was recessed at 4:30 p.m.**

**The meeting resumed on November 6, 2003 at 8:30 a.m.**

**Status of Commercial Fisheries Information Network**

D. Donaldson of Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) stated that the

Fisheries Information Network (FIN) is a cooperative state-federal program to collect information on recreational and commercial fisheries. Donaldson reported on several FIN activities currently taking place, including the trip ticket program, headboat and menhaden sampling, biological sampling, and implementation of the data management plan. The trip ticket program is operating in Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida. Mississippi has trip tickets for oyster, bait shrimp, and finfish, and Texas is looking at the feasibility of a trip ticket program. Approximately 170 dealers are currently using electronic trip ticket reporting.

Donaldson reported that 40,000 otoliths from 60 different species have been collected for biological sampling, however in 2004 greater amberjack and king mackerel will not be targeted due to a funding shortfall. Donaldson reported that the data management system is now online with trip ticket information as well as historical information, recreational data, menhaden data, and SEAMAP data.

Donaldson reported that there were some new activities planned for 2004 but because of the funding deficit they will not be done. One of these activities was to test the at-sea sampling methodology in Alabama on headboats, and another was to collect detailed effort for blue crab in Louisiana. Donaldson reported that NMFS is currently involved in a bycatch initiative and this information will be used to identify priority species.

### **Presentation of Fish Maturation Photos**

Ed Little of NMFS in Key West, Florida gave a presentation on fish maturation. Little noted that he took the photos with a digital camera and Pam Eyo of the NMFS Miami office produced the PowerPoint presentation and graphics.

Little noted that from each sex, up to eight stages of reproduction can be identified. These stages are virgin, maturing virgin, developing, developed, gravid, spawning, spent, and resting. Little had photographs of four major fish species groups found in South Florida, mangrove snapper, king mackerel, yellowtail snapper, and groupers showing details for determining sex and stages of maturation in each.

After Little's presentation there was a question and answer session with the port samplers. Linda Lombardi reported that the NMFS Panama City Lab website has information on

how to correctly remove gonads. The Panama City Lab will also provide samplers with needed supplies.

### **Presentation of Survey for Sampling Methods**

Guy Davenport of NMFS Miami reported that the TIP Work Group has been reviewing sampling techniques and protocols. Davenport noted that this Work Group wants to do a survey of field personnel activities in order to provide constructive recommendations for samplers so assessment scientists can better utilize the efforts of those in the field.

Davenport introduced Jim Zweifel and Patty Phares to the port samplers. Phares explained that the TIP Work Group is made up of several people from Sustainable Fisheries Division from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center. The goals are to provide a comprehensive review of TIP and to make recommendations for improvements. Members of the Work Group include Josh Bennett, Nancy Cummings, Jim Zweifel (designer of TIP), Ching-ping Chih and Patty Phares. Phares noted that John Poffenberger is also involved in the project.

Phares noted that TIP is a very complex program and is now 20 years old and has not had a major review until this time. Phares reported that the Work Group will be communicating with the port samplers beginning in the next few months through the next year with site visits and telephone calls. A questionnaire has been developed on how samplers respond to certain situations and Phares stressed the importance of accurately answering these questions.

Jim Zweifel reported that TIP was first introduced almost 20 years ago at Atlantic Beach, North Carolina and after two decades it seems time to review and evaluate. Zweifel noted the importance of the samplers role in fisheries management and their experience and knowledge should be utilized whenever possible.

G. Davenport noted that they will be contacting state supervisors and all federal samplers will be involved in this survey. Davenport also noted that TIP biological sampling and the biological sampling being done with FIN have some slight differences and this effort will attempt to bring the two programs more closely aligned.

D. Donaldson suggested that a status of the survey be given at the port samplers meeting in 2004. The group discussed a possible location and time for the 2004 meeting. Linda



Lombardi suggested having the meeting at the NMFS Panama City Lab and it was agreed to hold the meeting sometime during the first week in November. It was also suggested that there be some otolith training and stock assessment information as agenda items.

**There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m.**

# DRAFT

## **STRIPED BASS TECHNICAL TASK FORCE MINUTES November 19-20, 2003 Apalachicola, Florida**

Chairman D. Frugé called the meeting to order at 8:40 a.m. The following lists attendance:

### Members Present

Michael Bailey, NMFS, St. Petersburg, FL  
Jim Barkuloo, Habitat Representative, Panama City, Florida  
Doug Frugé, USFWS, Ocean Springs, MS  
Rick Long, FWC, Midway, Florida  
John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, Alabama  
Howard Rogillio, LDWF, Lacombe, Louisiana

### Members Absent

Pete Cooper, Jr., Recreational Representative, Buras, Louisiana  
J.T. Jenkins, ADCNR/MRD Enforcement, Dauphin Island, Alabama  
Larry Nicholson, USM/CMS/GCRL, Ocean Springs, Mississippi  
Ike Wirgin, NYU School of Medicine, Tuxedo, New York  
Robert Weller, GDNR, Albany, Georgia

### Staff Present

Steve VanderKooy, Program Coordinator, Ocean Springs, Mississippi  
Cindy Yocom, Staff Assistant, Ocean Springs, Mississippi

### Adoption of Agenda

By consensus, the agenda was adopted as presented.

### Approval of Minutes

M. Bailey moved to approve the minutes from the meeting held June 10-12, 2003, in Biloxi, Mississippi. H. Rogillio seconded the motion which was approved by consensus.

### Status of Development

D. Frugé inquired whether I. Wirgin had contacted E. Long regarding the genetics section. E. Long replied that he had not. E. Long will contact I. Wirgin regarding the status of the section. If something is not received by the end of the year, D. Frugé may attempt to draft it. This section should not delay progress of the document.

S. VanderKooy provided the group with a general update on progress. Section 3 is progressing steadily and will be edited during this meeting. Section 4 has been cleaned up somewhat. M. Bailey will have a draft of Section 6 for the group to review tomorrow. An update of

mailed  
1/9/04

# DRAFT

progress is needed from I. Wirgin. Within the biology section, editing was done to keep river systems separated. It may be repetitive; however, the information is easier to find this way.

D. Frugé researched the use of the term "Gulf race." Several taxonomists (Drs. Steve Ross, Jim Williams, and Royal Sutkus) agreed that this use is appropriate. Only one thought "population" was more appropriate. Frugé found that the use of race, population, and strain are almost interchangeable in recent taxonomic literature. All of these terms should be in the glossary.

## General Comments and Edits

Section 3 was reviewed extensively and changes were made to the document using the computer projection. Assignments and needs are listed as follows:

### **Action Items**

The original FMP is cited Nicholson et al. 1986. Make sure it is used consistently throughout the document.

S. VanderKooy - scan available literature and burn to CD for distribution to the group

S. VanderKooy - add terms to glossary (strain, race, river miles, navigational miles, etc.)

Make sure the tense agrees throughout your sections. Use past tense where applicable.

Italicize *Morone*

S. VanderKooy - Add a table of standard temperature conversions

S. VanderKooy - Add a table of common formulas to convert to metric

J. Barkuloo will research Croteau ND

J. Barkuloo will send Croteau 1984 to D. Frugé

Use stock into

Use river miles (RM) throughout except when specifically cited otherwise

S. VanderKooy - convert Section 4 back to river miles

## Section 3

Add maps and Figures

Use the standard cfs

#### 3.1.4.1 Mobile-Alabama-Tombigbee River system

Doug add two museum specimens identified by Rick, 1956 and 1961 from Mobile bay.  
Add Minton references

#### 3.1.5.1 Perdido River

Minton references & Morone workshop summaries

#### 3.1.5.2 - 3.1.5.5, 3.1.5.7, 3.1.5.8

Add references

#### 3.1.5.9 Steinhatchee and St. Marks Rivers

Doug double check Swift et al. 1986 regarding Steinhatchee - may need to move to create

#### 3.1.5.11 Small Florida Gulf Coast Rivers

#### 3.2.1.1.1 Gulf Race

¶12 reference - nDNA technique

¶13 check references, get Ike's opinion on last sentence

¶14 check references

#### 3.2.1.2.1 Eggs

S. VanderKooy - give cites to DF on egg buoyancy differences along the Atlantic coast

#### 3.2.1.2.2 Larvae

¶3 J. Mareska double-check whether this is standard length, body length, TL or FL - Hardy cite

#### 3.2.1.2.3 Juveniles

¶2 FL or TL?, check 174 mm

D. Frugé go back and look at the original reference and redraft if necessary. Techniques have advanced, otoliths used to age fish now (FWC reports).

¶4 Somewhere discuss "Protogyny"? D. Frugé to check Setzler-Hamilton et al. (1980). If there is information on this it should probably be discussed in Section 3.2.4.1 (Gonadal Development). Section 3.2.4 (Reproduction) makes reference to hermaphroditism.

#### 3.2.1.2.5 Length-Weight Relationships and Coefficient of Condition

D. Frugé look at Setzler-Hamilton et al. (1980) for length-weight formula, Creteau et al. 1981

#### 3.2.1.3 Abnormalities and Anomalies

¶10 1-4 Larry lumped?

#### 3.6 Parasites and Diseases

renumber this and subsequent sections

¶1 Francis-Floyd unpublished document and MERCK handbook from M. Bailey

¶2 Francis-Floyd unpublished document

# DRAFT

¶3 Francis-Floyd unpublished document

¶5 Francis-Floyd unpublished document

## 3.2.2 Age, Growth, and Survival

¶1 compared fry - check & clarify J. Mareksa

¶5&6 Average striped bass egg mortality rates of 68%-94% per day were cited by Bulak et al. (1993) for several Atlantic Coast rivers. Since striped bass produce a superabundance of eggs, Bulak et al. (1997) concluded that only a small portion of the total egg production needs to reach suitable habitat for good recruitment during any given year.

D. Frugé work into this paragraph – total life/survival

## 3.2.3.2 Use of Genetics to Distinguish Atlantic Coast Populations

¶2 last line begin with However?

¶3 Ely-need complete reference

### 3.2.3.2.1 Mitochondrial DNA Divergence between Gulf and Atlantic Coast Striped Bass

¶2 7 out of 17?

### 3.2.4.1 Gonadal Development

¶1 Can we shorten to just Hardy (1982)? Or use both references? Rulifson et al. (1982) cited Hardy (1978)

¶2 Crateau ND

### 3.2.4.2 Spawning and Season

¶3 D.F. – Burgey, Rolifson... 2003 N. Am. Journal of ... has gravity rates ADD (SJV has paper provided by E. Long.

#### 3.2.4.2.2 Spawning Season

¶3 Crateau ND

¶4 last line - 9,000- 290,000 D. Frugé check number

#### 3.2.4.2.4 Mississippi-Atchafalaya River System

¶4 D. Frugé to add Doug Henley info

#### 3.2.4.2.6 Mobile-Alabama-Tombigbee River System

¶2 Review records for the fish that were stocked in this system. Verify genetics. Verify whether Gulf or Atlantic.

#### 3.2.4.2.7 Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint River System

¶3 D. Frugé to add upstream info, check whether Mesing is 1990 or personal communication

¶5 Keefer 1986 citing Gennings 1970?

## 3.2.4.4 Incubation and Larval Transport

¶6 1 ft/sec?, Pomoke sp.?

### 3.3.2.3 Temperature

¶3 thermal niches, thermal refugia?

### 3.3.3.1 Salinity

J. Barkuloo noted that St. Johns fish dumped directly into saltwater for transportation - high survival 1962-64, probably 63. D. Frugé find the Federal Aid Report.

### 3.3.3.3 Dissolved Oxygen

¶1 thermal refuges

### 3.3.3.4 pH

J. Barkuloo noted Leetown hatchery (WV) pH and temperature tolerance tests

### 3.3.3.5 Total Hardness

¶1 (e.g., list rivers)

Any studies on forage critters and productivity related to hardness?] Contaminants are not as lethal in buffered waters.

### 3.4 Movement and Migration

¶7 thermal refugia

¶13 Forester and Frugé (1993) found the largest concentration of fish in their radio-telemetry study on the Sabine River at the upper end of the tailrace during the spring months. They attributed the concentration of fish to the Toledo Bend Dam blocking the **spawning migration** [were they actually migrating or just there to eat, dinner bell?]

¶16 thermal refugia

### 3.5 Feeding, Prey, and Predators

¶2 Blue crabs?

¶4 Cormorants?

### 3.7 Stock Enhancement

¶1 first occurrence of NFH?

¶5 H. Rogillio share stocking info with D. Frugé

¶12 Phase II preferred Jordan paper? H. Rogillio send to D. Frugé

### 3.8 Stock Status and Stocking

¶1 Correct way to cite?

#### 3.8.1 Texas

¶1 Stocking continued through \_\_\_\_? (cite). Add table.

#### 3.8.2 Louisiana

¶1 Chipman 1956?

#### 3.8.2.4 Tangipahoa River

# DRAFT

¶1 H. Rogillio update

3.8.4.1 Mobile-Alabama-Tombigbee River System

¶1 "virtually extinct"? (cite)

¶2 Update stocking numbers

3.8.5.5 Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint Rivers

¶2 Beginning in 1980 efforts were made to stock Gulf race fingerlings into the system, although the state of Georgia continued to stock Atlantic race fish into some upstream reservoirs until at least 1990 (Barkuloo 1990) [J. Barkuloo and R. Weller: Verify and obtain numbers for D. Frugé.]

## Section 6

J. Barkuloo to send M. Bailey interviews of recreational-type fishermen from the 1960s

All states - send catch information to M. Bailey

All states - review tables for correctness

E. Long - send creel data summary beginning in 1979 and lower river summary to M. Bailey

J. Barkuloo - send Kirvin interview to M. Bailey

Add "raw" MRFSS data to the section.

## Timeline/Next Meeting

S. VanderKooy advised the group that revised sections will be distributed to the group for their review and comment. Those portions of 3, 4, 6, and 7 will be in the next mail-out. An interim meeting will be held to edit those sections. Once the entire document is assembled, it will be distributed to the group before a final work session.

The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for February 2004. Several state park sites were mentioned, and staff agreed to further research Roosevelt State Park (Mississippi) for the next meeting.

**There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 5:10 p.m.**

**DRAFT**

**MINUTES**

**GULF OF MEXICO FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

**TEXAS HABITAT PROTECTION ADVISORY PANEL**

**HOUSTON, TEXAS**

**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2003**

**ATTENDANCE:**

Members:

Bill Baker	Reliant Energy
Dana Larson	Rigs to Reefs Company
Russ Miget	Texas Sea Grant College Program
Bob Spain	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Robert Stickney	Texas Sea Grant College Program
Rusty Swafford	Proxy for Ric Ruebsamen, NOAA Fisheries
Fred Werner	USFWS

Staff:

Jeffrey Rester	Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission
Cheryl Noble	Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission

Others:

Robert Adami	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department - Coastal Fisheries
Bill Balboa	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
David Blankinship	USFWS
Norman Boyd	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Jeff DallaRosa	Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
Shelley DuPuy	Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary
Lisa Gonzales	HARC
Joe Hendrix	Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
William Jackson	Marine Resource Management Specialist
Russell Kiesling	Reliant Energy
Cindy Loeffler	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Jerry Mambretti	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department - Coastal Fisheries
Robert McFarlane	Consultant
Eddie Seidensticker	Natural Resources Conservation Services
Debbie Sparks	USFWS Texas Coastal Program



Terry Stelly	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department - Coastal Fisheries
Janelle Stokes	Army Corps of Engineers
Glen Sutton	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department - Coastal Fisheries
Wes Tunnel	Harte Research Institute
Marty Underwood	USFWS
Charlotte Vucera	Texas Department of Transportation
Leslie Williams	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department - Coastal Fisheries
Paula Rankin Wise	Army Corps of Engineers
Woody Woodrow	Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
Heather Young	NOAA Fisheries

### **Call to Order and Introduction of Advisory Panel Members**

Chairman Bill Baker called the meeting of the Texas Habitat Protection Advisory Panel (AP) to order at 9:00 a.m. on Tuesday, December 9, 2003 at the Hobby Airport Hilton in Houston, Texas.

### **Adoption of Agenda**

Mr. Baker wanted to discuss section 316B of the Clean Water Act and Mr. Larson asked to have an update on the terracing project in Galveston Bay under other business. With these additions, the agenda was adopted.

### **Approval of Minutes**

The minutes of the Texas Habitat AP meeting held on December 4, 2001 were approved as written.

### **Sabine-Neches Waterway Deepening Project**

Ms. Stokes and Ms. Wise of the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) gave a presentation on the widening and deepening of the Sabine-Neches Waterway (SNWW) from offshore waters into Port Arthur and Beaumont, Texas. Deepening the channel would result in the channel extending approximately 11 miles further into the Gulf of Mexico. The current 40-foot depth and narrow channel widths restricted vessel movement to one-way convoys and daylight-only sailing. The Corps is currently developing a draft EIS and feasibility study to investigate enhancing the navigation efficiency of the waterway and improving safety along the waterway. The feasibility study was investigating 45, 48 and 50-foot depths. Preliminary results indicated that the 48-foot depth would maximize the cost/benefit ratio. The widening analysis concluded that the most effective plan would be to widen the channel to 700 feet from the Sabine Pass jetties to the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW). This represented about 63 miles of dredging. Widening of the SNWW north of the GIWW would not be included in this plan. Nearly all of the widening would occur within the existing shorelines. The primary environmental concerns were the interrelated issues of saltwater intrusion, marsh loss and destruction of wildlife habitat and fishery nursery areas. A great deal of

concern was expressed regarding the potential for a deeper channel to allow more saltwater intrusion, and for these higher salinity levels to contribute to further degradation of marshes in both Texas and Louisiana. The public and agencies identified severely stressed marsh areas in the Keith Lake/Salt Bayou area, in the east Sabine Lake area and Louisiana marshes along the GIWW East and Sabine River. Marsh grasses in these areas have been dying, due in large part to salt-induced stress in turn leading to erosion. Concerns about potential impacts to salinity levels and circulation patterns in the Sabine Lake estuarine system were being addressed with a hydrodynamic/salinity model that would predict changes resulting from the proposed improvements. Some mitigation measures for salinity impacts were identified. They include underwater sills to block the salinity wedge, linear slants along the navigation channel to keep high salinity waters in the deep-water channel, and individual salinity control structures on smaller bayous leading into extensive marsh areas.

Mr. Baker asked what the estimated volume of material would be when dredging to the 50-foot depth. Ms. Stokes said she did not have that information with her, though they had calculated it. She stated that 63 miles would be dredged in the channel and another 11 miles offshore.

Mr. Werner asked if they had looked at the impacts to the swamps north of Interstate 10. Ms. Stokes said they were being evaluated.

Mr. Miget asked about the history of accidents in the channel and if they were responding to a problem or trying to avoid a problem. She said they were trying to avoid a problem because of the narrow channel. Mr. Miget then asked if this would allow two-way traffic. She said the area south of Port Arthur would allow two-way traffic, but it was too narrow north of Port Arthur.

Mr. Larson asked who were the primary users of the channel. Ms. Stokes replied the petrochemical industry was the primary user. Mr. Larson then asked if the petroleum industry was contributing to the cost and she stated they were.

Mr. Stelly asked if she was aware of the recent developments of liquefied natural gas terminals on the Louisiana and Texas shoreline in that area. Ms. Stokes said yes and the regulatory agency was handling that now.

Mr. Mambretti asked if the slide of Bessie Heights with the terracing was conceptual or was that the plan the team developed. She said the restoration team worked on this plan but it was still conceptual. They would have to do a cost estimate analysis to determine if it was feasible and will have beneficial uses.

### **Reopening Parker's Cut at the Mouth of the Colorado River**

Mr. Underwood made a presentation on the possible reopening of Parker's Cut at the mouth of the Colorado River. In the early 1920s, a logjam on the Colorado River was blown near Wharton, Texas. By 1936, a land bridge formed in Matagorda Bay as a result of this action which separated East Matagorda Bay from the rest of Matagorda Bay. The Corps dredged the Colorado River directly

into the Gulf of Mexico. Parker's Cut was created to provide access to Matagorda Bay for oyster shell dredging. A study in 1913 determined that Matagorda Bay could produce over 3 million bushels of oysters per year on over 6,000 acres of reef. A 1961 study found that two-thirds of the reefs in Matagorda Bay no longer existed and there were not enough oysters on the reefs still existing for commercial production. In the early 1990s, a Corps project began to divert freshwater from the Colorado River into Matagorda Bay. The project goals were to increase commercial fisheries, increase intertidal marsh (2,000 acres in 50 years), and create 37 acres of oyster reef as mitigation for the project. Part of the project included damming Parker's Cut near the mouth of the river. Now, the Port of Bay City wants to reopen Parker's Cut to allow easier access from Matagorda Harbor. They were not convinced the diversion was benefiting the area. Reopening Parker's Cut would increase salinities up to 8 ppt in the area of Parker's Cut opening into Matagorda Bay. It would have an overall increase of 1 ppt as far as 2 miles out from Parker's Cut opening. There would also be some initial loss of the current delta through erosion with water entering through the Parker's Cut opening. After 9 years, the Corps diversion project has created 314 vegetated acres. The goal of the project was creating 600 acres in 20 years. Despite two major droughts after the diversion, salinities were lower overall in the eastern part of Matagorda Bay. The FWS has recommended that the dam on Parker's Cut remain in place.

Mr. Miget asked Mr. Underwood if he considered any negative effects from not opening Parker's Cut relative to immigration of species from offshore into the eastern part of west Matagorda Bay. Mr. Underwood said it was quite a distance to the Intracoastal Waterway and the ship channel was very large and very deep. He said he could show the animations and how much influence it had.

Mr. McFarlane stated that back in the 1980s, FWS contracted with Neil Armstrong and George Ward to do studies in Matagorda Bay and they produced three reports. Two of the reports were published. Management strategies were produced in a third report, but the FWS refused to publish it. The reason it was not published was that it advised against the diversion of the river and if the river was diverted, not to close Parker's Cut.

### **The Harte Research Institute**

Dr. Tunnel of the Harte Research Institute discussed the Institute and their goals and objectives. The Institute was created by an endowment (\$46 million) by Ed Harte in September 2000. The Institute will have six endowed chairs, twelve endowed graduate research assistantships, and an endowed operating budget. The mission of the Institute is to support and advance the long-term sustainable use and conservation of the Gulf of Mexico. Mr. Harte wanted the Institute to "make a difference." The Institute recently held a Gulf of Mexico planning workshop attended by 50 Gulf of Mexico scientists (38 from the US, 10 from Mexico, and 2 from Cuba). One of the first projects the Institute undertook was the GulfBase ([www.gulfbase.org](http://www.gulfbase.org)) project that started in 2002. GulfBase was a research database that lists researchers, institutes, and their projects. Future projects include a 50-year update of the 1954 "Gulf of Mexico -Origin, Waters, and Marine Life" which is a digest of knowledge on the Gulf of Mexico and an all taxa inventory of the Gulf of Mexico.

Mr. Miget said the Institute would be sponsoring a course that would be taught in both Corpus Christi and Galveston this spring. The lecture would be by ex-senator Arnold J. Schwartz who was very involved with environmental legislation in Texas. It would give the history and some of the law associated with coastal legislation and coastal regulation.

Mr. Seidensticker asked how close the Institute was with the Gulf of Mexico Program and if there was a possibility that in the future these programs would merge. Dr. Tunnel said they are in contact with the Gulf of Mexico Program regularly, and they are a partner in the State of the Gulf Conference. He said until the Institute was up and running with a full staff, there would not be a lot of involvement with any programs other than the projects he mentioned, but they fully intend to integrate as much as possible.

Mr. Baker asked if the 2005 Gulf Conference would be held in Houston. Dr. Tunnel said that at this point it was scheduled to take place in Corpus Christi.

### **Bahia Grande Restoration Project**

Mr. Blankinship of the FWS discussed the 6,800-acre Bahia Grande restoration near Port Isabel, Texas. Early last century, the Bahia Grande was a productive bay, but dredging of the Brownsville Ship Channel in 1933 reduced its connection to the Laguna Madre system. Building Highway 48 in 1950 further reduced its connection. Currently, the area only receives water from storm tides or heavy rainfall, and quickly dries. There have always been plans to flood the area, but the area was privately owned and the owners had concerns about flooding. That changed when the FWS bought the land and brought it into the National Wildlife Refuge system. The FWS is now developing a plan to flood the area. They are examining ways to construct channels connecting the entire area to the Brownsville Ship Channel. The area is approximately 3-3.5 feet below sea level, and during low tide, water will cover 4,000 acres. At high tide, water will cover 5,000 acres. It is expected that black mangroves would grow around the water's edge, and the FWS may plant seagrass.

Ms. Wise said the Corps has a program with funds available for potential ecosystem restoration projects and suggested he research that. She said depending on the project, the program will fund 50-75% of the restoration.

Mr. Baker asked if the delay in opening channel E was due to negotiations with the navigation district or a permit or funding issue. Mr. Blankinship said yes to all of the above. Mr. Baker then asked if Channel A could be constructed more rapidly than going through the other processes. Mr. Blankinship said Channel A would have been constructed already, but they had weather related problems. The channels had to be surveyed and hopefully, if channel A is the one they proceed with, it will begin in the early part of next year.

Mr. Baker said he was an avid birder and asked if the property is now open. Mr. Blankinship said it is not open at this time, but once it is they will consider opening it for fishing, waterfowl hunting and probably non-motorized boats.

Mr. Swafford thanked Mr. Blankinship for his efforts. He had to deal with over 50 landowners to purchase the property and it is one of the largest wetland restoration projects in the country. He said getting over 6,000 acres of productive fisheries habitat back into the system was quite an accomplishment.

Mr. Stelly asked if there would be a control structure on Channel E and Mr. Blankinship said no the costs were prohibitive.

### **Current Freshwater Inflow Issues in Texas**

Ms. Loeffler of TPWD discussed current freshwater issues affecting the Texas coast. The most daunting task facing Texas water managers was providing enough water for a population that would double by 2050. The demand for water will increase while the supply will actually decrease slightly. Most water rights were issued prior to 1985 and had no provision for environmental flows. There are over 200 major reservoirs in Texas and only a handful have releases for environmental flows. Most of the water rights for south Texas have been appropriated. Since most water rights in other coastal areas are already appropriated with perpetual permits, there is only one chance to address impacts and provide water for the environment. This places the burden of providing for environmental flows on new water rights. Water managers are examining other ways to meet the water demand. These include interbasin transfers, reuse of treated wastewater, and desalination plants. Three desalination plants are proposed for Freeport, Corpus Christi, and the lower Rio Grande Valley. Four organizations have applied for water rights for instream use of water that would provide for water for the environment. All four applications were denied. Recently, an Environmental Flow Study Commission was formed that would examine ways to provide for environmental flows while meeting the demand of other users. TPWD is a voting member of this commission.

Mr. Miget asked how much freshwater is used by agriculture and whether drinking water is significantly declining. Ms. Loeffler said more than 50% of the freshwater is used by agriculture. Mr. Miget then asked, because of the growing population and the need for freshwater in the cities and suburbs, is it possible the law could change for the existing water rights. Ms. Loeffler said they are placing more emphasis on conservation but not to the point of enforcement. The conservation task force is considering three major areas for development of best management plans for freshwater: municipal, agricultural and industrial. She said that going back and readdressing existing water rights would not be possible. The only exception to this would be the cancellation of water rights. Texas law and other western states' laws state that if the water right are not used for the original stated purpose, the state could take it back. She said there is also water marketing where water rights could be sold legally under the law.

Mr. Baker asked if the four desalination plants she showed on the coastal map are existing intake structures. Ms. Loeffler replied they are.

T. Stelly asked if there is a plan from a contracting firm from Spain. Ms. Loeffler said there were meetings in Austin with a company called Spain Concrete and Steel that proposed building an offshore seawater desalination plant that would be wind powered, but she did not know the outcome of the meetings.

Mr. Swafford asked if the optimal yield numbers for freshwater inflow are continually updated. Ms. Loeffler said one of the biggest challenges for the resource agencies is trying to keep current. She stated that it is hard to determine optimal yields while changes are made to the system.

Mr. Werner asked if these water right applications are entirely consistent with original water plans and management strategies. Ms. Loeffler stated most are.

### **Beneficial Use of Dredged Material in Galveston Bay**

Mr. Seidensticker of the U.S. Department of Agriculture updated the AP on the beneficial use of dredged material from the widening and deepening of the Houston Ship Channel. The Houston Ship Channel is currently being dredged to 45 feet in depth and 530 feet in width. The lower portion of the channel into Galveston will be 45 feet in depth and 650-1,112 feet in width. The Port of Houston, along with the Corps and other resource agencies developed an extensive beneficial use plan that would create 4,250 acres of inter-tidal salt marsh, a six-acre bird nesting and habitat island, restore a couple of islands in the northern portion of the bay, build new oyster reefs, and construct an underwater berm to enhance fish habitat. Approximately 1,500 acres of marsh has been created so far. Some marsh components are currently being built, while the remainder of the 4,250 acres would be built in the future with maintenance dredge material. The Corps and Port of Houston have been dedicated to creating the marsh areas. Some areas were built higher than marsh elevations and the Corps and Port of Houston are working to correct the problems.

Mr. Larson asked how many acres are included in the \$100 million and Mr. Seidensticker said 1,400 acres combined. Mr. Larson then asked how much was that per acre. Mr. Swafford said it really does not work out per acre because the actual dredging per yard had to be disposed. Originally in the plan they were going to dump it out in the bay 4 feet deep over 1,000 acres, so he does not think the costs were broken down compared to how much it would cost to build a levee. Mr. Seidensticker said he thinks one of the things they looked at was the beneficial use plan as opposed to the NED plan, which was the national economic data plan. He said that considering litigation and offsite, the lowest costs for disposal is using the beneficial use plan. Mr. Swafford said part of that is based on redredging and placing the material adjacent to the channel.

Mr. Baker asked how far a pound of seeds would go. Mr. Seidensticker said that he estimates that 20 pounds of seed would plant 80 acres on sand. He said there are approximately 10,000 seeds per ounce, and the cost of planting is minor. It is more expensive to transplant.

Mr. Miget asked if the breakthrough for seeding is the seed production or germination. Mr. Seidensticker said that the seed is collected in a ball then treated in a refrigerated environment in

saltwater for about an eight-week period.

Mr. McFarlane asked if any terns or skimmers are nesting on Redfish Island since that project was completed, and Mr. Seidensticker said yes.

Mr. Larson asked if they could have an update on the terracing in West Bay, and Mr. Baker stated this would be a good place to do that.

Mr. Seidensticker said the Jumbile Cove and Pierce Marsh projects are looking outstanding. There were a few problems at Galveston Island State Park with some of the outside levees washing away. He stated that terracing has many problems, but the state park looks gorgeous.

Mr. Larson asked if there was a problem with the geotube. Mr. Swafford stated that at the state park the UV shroud disintegrated within a year or two, so there was an effort to go back and fix the shroud. As an unexpected benefit, both clover grass and shoal grass appeared behind some of the tubes. He stated that was a tremendous, unexpected resource benefit.

### **Election of Chairman**

Mr. Larson moved to elect Bill Baker as Chairman. Mr. Stickney seconded and it passed unanimously.

### **Other Business**

Mr. Baker asked Mr. Larson to give an update on the disposition of the Galveston Causeway. Mr. Larson said there was motion, but he would not exactly say progress. He said under the subject of environmental enhancement off Texas, the US Navy donated some ships to South Carolina to be used as artificial reefs. Research was done, and it is believed there was no danger in using the ships for artificial reefs. The Navy has now committed to downsizing their old fleet, and Texas has a bid in for one of the ships. He said it would be a few months before they know if Texas would obtain the ship, but other companies are interested in downsizing their fleets also. He said that as soon as they get rid of the two causeways, they would probably decide to replace the railroad trestle to Galveston. In addition, Hummel Bridge would go offshore. The Lavaca Bay causeway, which is two miles long and six lanes wide, is scheduled to be replaced as well as several causeways around Corpus Christi. As a result, there is a tremendous amount of rubble that can be put offshore. The problem is that TXDOT has to go with the lowest bid, and they cannot spend any money to take rubble offshore. TPWD has no money to do it either. They do not look at the benefits and the value of spending the money to take this offshore.

Mr. Baker said he thought there was a fund set aside for artificial reef construction and management in the state of Texas. He asked if there is a reason that those funds cannot be used to transport the material offshore. Mr. Larson said they have committed \$500 thousand dollars to transport the Navy ship and \$200 thousand for transportation of the causeway, but that money was being used for

conversion of oil platforms.

Mr. Swafford said there is a proposal to build a new causeway to Padre Island that would have a large impact on turtle grass. There are several alternatives for building the causeway. He suggested inviting someone from TXDOT to give a presentation on this at the next meeting. He stated he would keep Mr. Rester informed of the progress of this project and he would forward the information to the Advisory Panel.

Mr. Baker said there is a section in the Clean Water Act, Section 316B that deals with impingement and entrainment that may have a revised rule because of a lawsuit against the EPA. The rule would affect power plants significantly and also have fishery impacts. The new rule would require a significant increase in survival rates and a dramatic increase in the elimination of entrainment. The new rule should come out in 2004. The draft rule gives options for large water users as to how to address this issue. He stated that instead of modifications, habitat restoration is an option. In cases where there can be an agreement that new technologies are not feasible, habitat restoration may be an alternative. Mr. Baker stated that habitat restoration is in the draft rule and expected it to be in the new rule. There may be an opportunity in the very near future for funds to be available to help in restoration projects on the coast. He recommended that this be another agenda item for the next meeting, because he should have more information by then.

Mr. Larson stated he was not sure of the purpose of the AP or if the panel is accomplishing anything. He said the basis for asking is that the PEW Ocean Commission Report made an observation that overfishing is occurring and it is not getting better. He said the report states that the fishery management councils have a conflict of interest because there should be a separation of allocation of fish and conservation. He said the AP should be making recommendations to the Council and no recommendations were made at the current meeting. He said he did not think the AP fulfilled the mission of advising the council to do a better job. So he asked what is the purpose of the AP, is that purpose being accomplished, and should it be adjusted?

Mr. Hendrix invited Mr. Larson to attend any of the council meetings to see what they do as opposed to what the Pew Commission reported. He said he would also be happy to send him a current status of the fisheries, fishery management plans, reports on effectiveness and the results of those plans, and he thought Mr. Larson would see something different than what the Pew Commission reported. He stated that as a council member he sought input from advisory panels as part of the decision making process.

Mr. Swafford said that in the past this body has sent recommendations to the council. The council was heavily involved in opposing the original Houston Ship Channel project. He was partially responsible for giving Mr. Rester these agenda items and the Sabine/Neches project has the potential to be another Houston ship channel project. The preliminary salinity model results indicate that there are going to be salinity increases on the east side of Sabine Lake, and it could have serious fishery impacts.



Mr. Baker stated a discussion on marine protected areas could be another agenda item for the next meeting. He said Dr. Tunnel made a good point that in Cuba, 25% of their waters are marine protected areas. Mr. Baker also informed the panel that they did not have to wait until December to have a meeting. It could be scheduled for any time.

Mr. Jackson said he is the chairman of the Aquatic Species Risk Assessment Workgroup for the Galveston Bay Foundation. He then briefly discussed the problems caused by invasive species and asked if that could be an agenda item for the next panel meeting. Mr. Baker said yes and asked if he would make the presentation. Mr. Jackson agreed. Mr. Jackson also asked the panel to reconsider only meeting once a year because there were important issues to be discussed.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 3:15. p.m.