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Development of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Compact

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THE FORMATION of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission is a subject of vital importance to the fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico. The Gulf of Mexico stretches for more than 3,000 miles along the coasts of Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. Within the 716,000 square miles of water there are tremendous resources in oysters, shrimp and many species of fish. These resources enrich the diet of millions of Americans and are the means of livelihood for thousands of citizens of the Gulf States.

For many years marine biologists and fisheries experts of the Gulf States have felt that a greater degree of interstate cooperation in developing the Gulf Fisheries resources would be of benefit to all of the Gulf States. The advantages to be gained for these fisheries by linking the Gulf States together in a formal, permanent compact was demonstrated clearly at the national Intercoastal Conference held in Washington in May, 1946. This conference, attended by representatives of the Gulf, Atlantic and Pacific coast states, was called to consider the implications of a Presidential proclamation which had the effect of extending the national interest in fisheries to the continental shelf and beyond. It was apparent during the Conference that the states of the Atlantic Seaboard, through the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission which they organized in 1942, were in a strong position to safeguard their interests with respect to the Federal government and international treaties and conventions. This unity has enabled the Atlantic Coast States to develop effective, coordinated programs for increasing their fisheries resources.

The three states bordering the Pacific Ocean perfected a similar compact in 1947, so that now the chain of interstate cooperation among the coastal states forms a continuous band from the State of Maine around to the State of Washington. There is much current talk concerning the organization of a fisheries compact among the states bordering the Great Lakes, and it is thought that within the next year or two such a compact will, in all probability, be perfected.

At the request of the Gulf States the Council of State Governments called a meeting of conservation and seafood agency officials from the Gulf area at New Orleans on October 10, 1946. This meeting considered plans for establishing a Gulf fisheries commission, and arranged to reconvene in New Orleans on December 5-6th with the Attorneys General and Commissions on Interstate Cooperation of the five states present. At the December meeting a preliminary draft of a Gulf State Marine Fisheries Compact was prepared.

A final draft of the compact was completed on April 10-11, 1947, in New Orleans. Present at this meeting were legislators, Attorneys General, conservation officials, fisheries representatives and Interstate Cooperation Commissioners. The Compact was referred to the five states for enactment, a Continuing Conference Committee was created to remain in existence until the Compact Commission was organized formally and the Council of State Governments was requested to serve the Conference Committee as secretariat during the period prior to formal organization.

The purpose of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Compact thus drafted was declared to be: "To promote the better utilization of the fisheries, marine, shell and anadromous, of the seaboard of the Gulf of Mexico, by the development of a joint program for the promotion and protection of such fisheries and the prevention of the physical waste of the fisheries from any cause." Briefly, it is an advisory and recommending body composed of three representatives from each of the member states.

The Commission is empowered to obtain necessary staff and officers and to inquire into and report on methods, practices, circumstances and conditions relative to the prevention of depletion and physical waste of the Gulf Fisheries. It is empowered, also, to recommend the coordination of state police power and to draft and recommend legislation to further the basic purposes of the Compact. It is expected that the joint interstate commission created by the Compact will prove to be an excellent medium for developing recommendations for eliminating trade barriers affecting the Gulf States and their fishermen as a result of licensing difficulties.

The Compact named the United States Fish and Wildlife Service as the primary research agency of the Commission, and designated that it cooperate with the research agencies in each of the member states.

The financing provisions of the Compact are contained in Article 12. They provide for an estimated initial working budget of \$13,000, prorated among the five Gulf States. This does not include travel costs and necessary expenses of the three Commissioners from each state, since such costs are to be borne by the respective member states, in a manner most acceptable to it.

Florida and Alabama adopted the Gulf Compact in 1947. Louisiana, during the regular 1948 session of its Legislature, became the third member state. The Texas Legislature passed the enabling act in 1949. It is hoped that Mississippi, whose Legislature did not meet this year, will take similar action at the next special session, or during the regular 1950 session, and thus complete the roster of member states.

Under the provisions of Article I, Section 10 of the Constitution of the United States, no two or more states can enter into a compact without the consent of Congress. This consent was given by Public Law 66, 81st Congress, signed by the President of the United States on May 19, 1949. On that day, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission came into being.

Arrangements for obtaining necessary legislation, and other activities affecting the development of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Compact have been handled by the Continuing Conference Committee and the Council of State Governments. Two meetings of the Continuing Conference Committee have taken place since the Compact was drafted—at the Edgewater Gulf Hotel, Edgewater, Mississippi, on May 27-28, 1948, and at New Orleans on October 11, 1948.

A final meeting preparatory to the formal organization of the Compact Commission was held at Montgomery, Alabama, on May 27, 1949. Representatives

of the five Gulf States met at that time as a Committee on Arrangements to develop necessary plans for the signatory meeting at Mobile, Alabama, on July 16, 1949. On that date the Commissioners of the member states met and witnessed the formal signing of the Compact by Governor James E. Folsom of Alabama. The machinery was thus set in motion to accomplish the purposes for which the Compact was intended. An organizational meeting was held at Houston, Texas on the 13th and 14th days of October, 1949, when rules and regulations for the Commission's procedure were adopted. The services of a permanent Secretary-Treasurer were secured and headquarters for the Commission was established at New Orleans, Louisiana. Arrangements were discussed whereby our research agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, would place in operation two vessels in the Gulf waters to conduct an intensive research and exploratory program.

In conclusion, it should be stated that great things are expected to arise out of our Gulf States Compact. The intimate association with such an outstanding organization as the Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute and its splendid work should prove of untold benefit to the Commission in its attempt to promote the better utilization of the fisheries of the Gulf Seaboard. The Commission is looking forward eagerly to a record of achievement. It is hoped that many vexing problems which are common to the Gulf States can be solved by providing a central forum where representatives of the states concerned can discuss these problems until satisfactory answers are attained. A thorough program of exploration and research should provide fisheries information which will be invaluable to the commercial industry as well as to the State Conservation Agencies which are charged by law with the duty of preserving and protecting the marine, shell and anadromous fisheries of the Gulf of Mexico.

The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission and the International Conference on the Northwestern Atlantic

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EARLY IN 1945 there was evidence of growing concern about possible increased fishing pressure on stocks of fish supporting international fisheries like those on the Newfoundland Banks. At the same time there were reports of possible future treaties that might be negotiated with respect to such fisheries.

Accordingly the Executive Committee of the Commission, meeting in New York on February 23, 1945, authorized the Chairman to appoint a committee to inform the U.S. State Department of the interest of the Commission in such matters and of its desire to participate therein. Such a committee was appointed and it met with officials of the State Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at the State Department on April 3, 1945. At that meeting the committee urged the Department to establish some procedure for consultation with the states on a regular basis with respect to conservation matters affecting the states and cited as precedents the treaties affecting halibut, salmon, and migratory birds and the treaty relating to the Great Lakes.

The committee pointed out the advisability of keeping the states continually informed of progress on such matters because in the last analysis enforcement and administration are best accomplished at the points of landing. After a full