

The State-Federal Fisheries Management Program and the Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Fishery

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This symposium marks an important new milestone in an important cooperative thrust – the State-Federal Fisheries Management Program. Most of you have heard these words from time to time during the past couple of years, but this is the first time in the Southeast, to my knowledge, that a group of state, Federal and industry people have sat down together in a public forum to discuss the feasibility and the mechanism for managing a fishery. This is very appropriate, however, because cooperation and coordination between and among states, the Federal Government and the industry is the name of the game. Our basic purpose is to plan and implement fishery management practices which are biologically sound, economically practical and socially acceptable.

My remarks will be directed primarily toward the mechanism and structures under which we are proposing to move forward in the State-Federal Fisheries Management Program. It is generally believed that this mechanism might be used nationwide, and not just in the Southeast. It is based on the establishment of several types of working committees, each with its special function.

Committees

The first is a policy-setting regional State-Federal Council composed of the directors of state marine resource agencies and the Southeast Regional Director of the National Marine Fisheries Service. We have made progress here in that invitations have been sent to and accepted by representatives of each of the eight coastal states. The council will be responsible for setting overall policy, selecting fisheries to be considered for cooperative management and will review and approve fishery management recommendations. When the council meets, it will consider appointing technical committees to provide information on each fishery being considered for management. Each technical committee would be composed of one member from each coastal state and advisors from the National Marine Fisheries Service or industry. The technical committees will, in turn, develop the details, regulations and other procedures necessary for management. Industry will be asked to cooperate and work with both the State-Federal Council and the technical committees, as appropriate, in an advisory capacity. I want to stress, however, that the precise mechanism for securing industry input is not pinned down and is completely flexible.

So far, the states of the Southeast Region have formed separate informal technical committees for the Gulf and the South Atlantic areas. Since the

council has not yet met to formally appoint committees, these informal committees are working under the auspices of the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission. One of the committees has been termed the "Gulf States Technical Committee for Menhaden Management." It includes representatives from Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. The other committee is called the "South Atlantic States Technical Committee for Shrimp Management." It includes representatives from North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida.

Priority Fisheries

The Gulf States have tentatively chosen menhaden, groundfish, snappers-groupers, mackerels and billfishes as the priority fisheries to consider for management. The South Atlantic States tentatively selected shrimp and blue crab. These tentative selections will be subject to additions or deletions as the need arises.

Research

While the State-Federal Fisheries Management Program is a priority program within the National Marine Fisheries Service, it is still very much a fledgling program with respect to funding. However, we have been able to hire some people, finance a few small contracts and to undertake some in-house research.

Current work includes a contract with South Carolina's Division of Marine Resources for the "South Atlantic Shrimp Fishery: A Management Planning Profile" in support of activities of the South Atlantic States Technical Committee for Shrimp Management. A "Study of Legal and Institutional Feasibility of Uniform or Reciprocal State Regulation of Fisheries" for all coastal states in the Southeast Region was recently completed under a contract agreement with the Louisiana State University. It was authored by Professor Gary Knight. The work is in support of the activities of the Gulf States Technical Committee for Menhaden Management, but will be applicable to all other fisheries in the region.

Menhaden Management Planning Profile

Our regional staff is developing a management planning profile for the Gulf menhaden fishery at the request of the menhaden technical committee. The profile will essentially encompass a description of the fishery, historical catch data, economic information and a discussion of some potential problems and management solutions. As this work pushes forward, our staff has been visiting members of the industry to become more familiar with its current status. We have been pleased to note that generally the Gulf menhaden industry is in reasonably good health. This condition is attributable to the good investors and managers within the industry. However, menhaden industry leaders are aware of potential problems that might arise from the attraction into the fishery of

excessive numbers of vessels and plants because of recent high prices for menhaden products.

In addition, we have noted a need to consider changing certain existing laws regulating the industry, deletion of some others and better coordination of all regulations among the states.

Federal-State-Industry Interface

In summary, the State-Federal concept described is designed to provide an interface for state and Federal managers and industry users of the Nation's natural marine resources. We believe that it can be a very effective mechanism providing for rational fisheries management. Laws and regulations should *not* be passed or promulgated merely for the sake of having them or because someone has the power to make them.

If we are to effectively conserve and allocate our fishery resources, we must remain prepared to rationally manage them and avoid undesirable consequences of unwise resource exploitation. The State-Federal Fisheries Management Program which encompasses the expertise of states and stresses the importance of industry advice in identifying problems and seeking solutions, appears to offer the best mechanism for fisheries resource management.