

# What Are The Most Significant Economic Trends In The Gulf And Caribbean Fisheries?

Summary by RICHARD A. KAHN, *Chief, Economics Section, U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Washington, D. C.*

ON THE BASIS of the papers presented during the Economic Session and on the subsequent discussions, the following economic trends in the Gulf and Caribbean fisheries can be observed:

1. There is a tremendous amount of fishery waste material (more than 300 million pounds per year) available in this area, which at present is used for commercial purposes only to a small extent. However, the main problem lies in improving the commercial use by proper collecting and reducing methods. Some areas have advantages in this respect over others. Shore landing facilities, processing plant and packaging houses are concentrated as in Florida, Louisiana and some other areas. Successful operation of waste reduction has begun in some places. In other areas the problem of transportation with regard to waste material is being attacked, and it can be expected that the industry will continue to use more and more waste material economically instead of throwing it away. Fishing for trash fish has become an activity in itself in some parts of the Gulf and Caribbean area. The present price of  $\frac{1}{2}$  cent per pound of trash fish, paid to the fisherman, gives supplemental income to boat owners and crews and permits the profitable operation of reduction plants even on part-time basis. Fishing for trash fish in some parts of the area is under legislative control and the trend is in the direction of licensing such control or at least bringing such control in accordance with the results of biological research and the demands of sound fishery management.

2. Observations of the Brownsville shrimp fishery led to the discussion of the shrimp situation in the area of the Gulf of Mexico and of the Caribbean Sea. There was unanimity of opinion that the shrimp resources are still great and to a large extent undiscovered. However, the trend is in the direction of adjustment of production and processing to price and market conditions. Fishermen will reduce operations if prices fall below a certain level, and imports from countries as Mexico and Honduras will decrease if the lower market price in the United States does not justify the higher transportation costs involved in such imports.

3. The paper on charterboat fishing in the Miami area revealed important new data on charterboat investment and income of boatowners and crew members of charterboats. There is a trend to extend charterboat fishing, and also partyboat fishing, from the mere sporting pleasure to implementation of the food supply, either of participant non-fishermen or of the crew members, who receive parts of the catch and sell them. It was the desire of the audience that these studies on the economic importance of charterboat and partyboat fishing be continued and perhaps enlarged as to include studies on the economic importance of sport fishing generally.

4. The Representative of the Netherlands gave an encouraging report on the fisheries in Surinam. There are great resources still untouched in the Guianas and the trend is to discover them by governmental exploratory fishing and to use them for implementation of the diet of the natives.

5. The paper on sponges revealed the strong competition the natural sponge faces by the synthetic sponge. However, opinion polls conducted among

druggists and hardware retailers in the United States reveal that consumers would in many cases prefer natural sponges if only the price would be in proper relationship to the price of the synthetic sponge. A price reduction of about 25 per cent could increase sales by about 300 per cent. In addition proper grading, good packaging, advertising, and availability in all desired sizes and at all times and conditions, upon which the expansion of the natural sponge market depends.

Reports from the Bahamas indicate that there is a trend towards recovery of the sponge beds which were depleted by diseases and overfishing about ten years ago. The encouraging report from the Bahamas justifies the hope that the Tarpon Springs area in the near future also will regain its former importance as the sponge production center of the United States.

In the discussion it was observed that, due to generally improved economic conditions in the Gulf and Caribbean area, the diet of the natives is improving, that fresh and frozen fish are entering markets in Puerto Rico, Venezuela and in other countries of this area, where formerly the inexpensive salted cod was the main fish food the native could afford. However, there was regret expressed that transportation conditions in many parts of the Caribbean area are still in a lamentable state so as to prevent the full use of the local fishery resources in the interest of the native population and in the economic interest of the area as a whole.

Many areas, however, report increased industrial fishery activity, as, for example, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Cuba, Mexico and, last but not least, the Gulf States of the United States. It can be hoped that this increased industrial fishery activity continues to contribute to the rising economic welfare of the people of our area.

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## How Can The Present Research In Exploratory Fishing And Fishing Technology Be Most Profitably Expanded?

*Summary by R. T. WHITELEATHER, Assistant Chief, Branch of Commercial Fisheries, U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D. C.*

During the discussion following "The Oregon's Investigations and Future Plans for Research" by Stewart Springer, the speaker further elaborated on the results of the deep water shrimp trawling investigations of the Oregon, indicating the practicability of trawling in depths of 250 fathoms with proper winches and other equipment. The Oregon haul-backs of the trawl took about 28 minutes when fishing at 250 fathoms. Although only a few drags were made, there was some indication that *Hymenopenaeus robustis* may exist in commercial quantities off Mississippi. Those caught had a pleasing taste, more like lobster and crab than common shrimp, but were soft in texture which may affect keeping quality. This species appeared to hold up satisfactorily when frozen aboard the vessel, however.

Questions arose as to scrap fish and invertebrates taken incidental to the general shrimp trawling work in the Gulf and as to utilization of those species. Great beds of echinoderms exist in some areas, but whether these have food or industrial value is questionable. Scrap fish, particularly small croakers, were taken in commercial volume but utilization is a difficult problem from the economic standpoint, owing to the lack of oil yield.