

# Letters

(responses to an editorial that Frank Sergeant helped write)

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The Tampa Tribune-Times, Sunday **August 11, 1991**

## *Recreational fishing is going downhill*

May I congratulate you on your July 30 editorial on our ever-diminishing natural resource: fish.

If only you had all the little nasty inside facts related to fishing, you would surely jump on it with the determination required to tend the abuses.

You correctly stated, "The region's fishermen went on a boat-building binge, encouraged in part by a federal loan program." Those boats were virtually all net boats of some kind - trawlers, purse seiners, etc. The loans (with our tax money) were at 2.5 percent interest. The loans were supposed to cover up to 85-90 percent of the boat's cost.

In reality, in most cases, they covered 100 percent of the boat's cost. A net result of no cost whatever to the fisherman. One case reported to me: one man bought 15 boats at no cost whatever to him. The cost ran into the millions. The "deal" also promised to buy back the ones that could not make a go of it. In that case, the fisherman would make a nice profit on his boat that he had no money in whatever.

You also correctly stated, "Florida sport fishermen decried the indiscriminate netting of kingfish in the Gulf of Mexico for more than a decade before the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Council did anything." The Florida League of Anglers was the nonprofit conservation agency responsible for bringing this problem before the commissioners.

Only recently has the council implemented measures helpful to the kingfish, no drift netting and closed seasons, namely.

George Barley, the first chairman of the Florida Marine Fish Commission, must be given credit for implementing a two-fish bag limit on kingfish in Florida waters (where less than 20 percent are caught).

All of this, of course, was only after 300 or so commercial hook and liners were put out of business. They were the ones that put quality fish on tables and never depleted the stock in doing so.

The kingfish has been responsible for many millions of dollars going into the state treasury and could be again if limited to hook and line only.

Correctly, again, you state, "The state Marine Fisheries Commission refuses to clamp down on the annihilation of roe mullet. In Tampa Bay, sardines and other baitfish critical to the estuary food chain were netted wantonly." All those fish combined created a billion-dollar plus recreational industry in this area alone and supported thousands of jobs in related businesses. And let us not forget the many thousands of tourists that go elsewhere to fish.

The baitfish abuses in this area have been permitted even though we have had at least two commissioners from this area consistently. They have chosen to let the netters wipe out the remaining few fish left.

There is no doubt in my mind that political appointees to the commission helped defeat-Bob Martinez for governor, and it seems that Governor Chiles has not learned from those mistakes.

Until we get knowledgeable people on the commission rather than political cronies of the governor, our once billion dollar recreational industry will keep going downhill. It is no wonder that the people are seriously thinking about a referendum on the ballot to correct what the politicians refuse to do.

GENE TURNER. St. Petersburg

**The letter writer is president of the Florida League of Anglers.**

# *Harvesting fish isn't like killing "Bambi"*

What a despicable editorial you published July 30, "Depleted U.S. fisheries rate rigorous conservation remedies."

Why would an honest journalist use words like "collapse, ravage, depleted, slaughter, perilously low, industry pressure, massacre, indiscriminate netting, annihilation, netted wantonly, dominated, timid bureaucrats, mismanagement, unchecked destruction, bidding of commercial industry, wiped out, immediately overfished, appeasing special interest, tactic and ruin," all in one editorial? The answer is, an honest journalist would never have written it.

1. Florida has not had a commercial fishing representative on the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council for the past nine years. This year's selection by the Bush administration was the president of FCA, Ted Forsgren's boss. South Carolina has never had a commercial fishing person since 1976, the year the Magnuson Act passed Congress. The Florida representative to the Gulf Council was Alex Jernigan, first president of FCA, for the past six years, and Florida has never had more than one commercial fishing rep on the Gulf Council since 1976. Hardly commercial domination.

2. Net fishing of King Mackerel amounted to less than 20 percent of the total king mackerel taken. Check with the federal agencies of state agencies that keep these records if you doubt what I say.

3. You say that the industry went to Congress, and it did our bidding and it promptly ended the council's jurisdiction over billfish." What an absolute and downright lie. The Billfish Management Plan, which created a special category of recreational management for a few, removed Atlantic billfish from the market place and reserved this fish for anglers. That plan is still in place, but at the urging of Bob Hayes, who is the lobbyist for the Gulf Coast Conservation Association, the group that sent \$250,000 over to Florida to start Forsgren's group, and was one of the prime movers to put the billfish plan under the Secretary of Commerce. Our "industry" didn't ask for such a move; the sportsfishing lobby worked it out.

4. The Florida MFC, which is and has been dominated for many years by sports fishermen, has clamped down to a great degree on mullet. Your editorial makes it sound like we are killing "Bambi" when we harvest fish. And if trout fishing is going down, you can bet your last dollar it's not because of excessive netting. Your anti-netting comments, which run completely through your editorial, are so misguided it appears that the writer might have worked for Karl Wickstrom of the Florida Sportsman magazine,

Finally, your, comments about the "tragedy of the commons" is so elitist that it calls to mind a poem I once saw which said words to the effect:

*They hang the thief who takes the goose  
And removes it from the commons.  
But the greater thief they turn loose,  
who steals the commons from the goose.*

Your mean-spirited editorial takes the commons from the goose by destroying the commercial fishing industry. The hardworking, taxpaying, food providing members of the commercial fishing industry deserve nothing less than a full apology for such a one-sided editorial.

BOB JONES  
Tallahassee

**The letter writer is executive director for the Southeastern Fisheries Association Inc.**