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OUR OPINION

Mutinous netters must keep dissent within legal limits

Something smells in three Gulfside counties - and it isn't the fish.

The countdown is on. On Saturday, the net ban amendment to Florida's Constitution takes effect. The Marine Patrol will put two officers on each boat to work 12-hour shifts. And the governor has alerted the National Guard as its services may be needed if civil disobedience or even fighting breaks out.

Voters felt strongly that the state must act now to preserve depleted fish stocks. Marine Fisheries Commission attempts to strengthen such protections, after all, had failed for a decade.

Enraged commercial fishing entrepreneurs are now trying to squiggle through a loophole in the law that exempts nets used "for scientific research or governmental purposes."

Gulf County commissioners declared that a fish processing freezer purchased by the county would become useless after the net ban therefore Commercial net fishing falls under governmental function and authority.

Franklin County commissioners saw a "government-activity" tie in the county's loan of \$500,000 to seafood dealers and commercial-fishing owners.

Wakulla County also passed a resolution declaring commercial fishing a government activity.

Does this not sound a lit fishy?

Members of the fishing industry bristled when Charles Lee of the Florida Audubon Society questioned whether local government officials were creatively trying to escape the ban. Emotions run' as deep as the blue waters of the Gulf on this amendment that robs many of their commercial-fishing livelihoods.

But no less than 71 percent of voters chose to ban gill nets in state waters and establish size limits on other met&

'The commercial fishing industry should stick to challenging the net ban in court and play by the new rules come Saturday. Fishing for loopholes isn't playing fair.