

Southeastern Fisheries Association, Inc.

Proudly serving the Commercial Fishing Industry for over 50 years!



Hotlines Online Edition



July 2002

Past President Paul Herring of Fort Myers (I), installs SFA's new president, Grant Erickson of Fort Myers. Paul Herring, like so many other SFA members, is a military veteran. Mr. Herring was shot down over Belgium in WW II and was hidden by Belgium citizens for 6 months until making it back to the Allied Lines. Grant is a third generation shrimp boat owner and packing family house operator and processor of domestic shrimp. Grant is a graduate from the University of Florida in the field of food technology. Grant intends to develop a dialogue with members of the environmental community who are not among those trying to ban commercial fishing. Grant follows a long line of outstanding men and women who have led SFA.



FLORIDA COMMERCIAL GROUPEY FISHING INDUSTRY SAVAGED

As expected, the sportfishing dominated Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, by a 13-3 vote, banned the use of the historical and efficient bottom tending longlines. Several spokesmen from the charter boat industry, including Bob Zales of Panama City and Mike Eller of Destin testified against commercial fishing in favor of the ban. The Florida longline fishermen harvested the largest portion of red

grouper legally offered to the consumers. The Council was magically innovative and obedient by crediting the recreational sector with a 30% reduction under a back-room brokered 22-inch size limit. Were commercial fishermen given a 30% reduction? You can bet your bottom dollar they were not. But anyone who is honest about red grouper recreational fishing on the West Coast of Florida knows that instead of reducing mortality the mortality from hooking and releasing undersized fish will increase. Several causes of this additional angler by-kill will come from ghost-fishing, non-biodegradable monofilament line and stainless steel hooks as well as the cryptic mortality following gut hooked undersized red grouper in shallow water. Catch, kill and release will be the name of the game. Chairman Roy Williams, Florida FWC Assistant Division Director for salt-water fisheries had no choice but to push for banning commercial fishing gear or his job could have been in jeopardy. Hopefully a higher authority will examine the red

grouper amendment debacle and bring it under the rule of law rather than the rule of CCA. Following are the actions taken on behalf of the US Secretary of Commerce.

1. Red grouper minimum size limit of 22 inches for both the commercial and recreational sectors.
2. Elimination of the Feb. 15-March 15 commercial closure for red, gag, and black groupers.
3. Maximum of 2 red grouper out of the 5-fish grouper aggregate bag limit.
4. Movement of the longline/buoy gear boundary line out to 50 fathoms.
5. Reduction of shallow-water grouper commercial quota from 9.35 million pounds to 7.08 million pounds (gutted weight).
6. Reduction of the deepwater commercial quota from 1.35 million pounds to 1.02 million pounds (landed weight).
7. Establishment of tilefish commercial quota of 0.44 million pounds (landed weight).

This newsletter is published by Southeastern Fisheries Association. Please pass it along and encourage others to be added to our mailing list.

If you want to be removed from the list, please contact us.

SFA is a non-profit association founded in 1952, charged with maintaining a viable seafood industry in the Southeast.

Robert P. Jones, Editor

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FLAWED MAGNUSON-STEVENS BILL PASSES HOUSE RESOURCE COMMITTEE

The United States House Resources Committee passed HR 4749 that would reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The bill as passed is opposed by Southeastern Fisheries Association because of the longline ban in the Mid-Atlantic inserted at the request of the radical element of the recreational fishing industry lobbyists in Washington DC.

There are some good parts in the proposal such as a periodic review of "Best Scientific Information Available." This has been a major concern for decades because the industry knows science is manipulated to accomplish predetermined goals and in one instance during Dr. Bill Fox's term as head of NMFS, best available science was sequestered because the data would have been helpful to the commercial fishing sector. One of the major provisions that would positively impact southern states is the provision to BAN THE SALE OF ALL FISH THAT HAVE BEEN RECREATIONALLY CAUGHT IN FEDERAL WATERS. This prohibition is long overdue and hopefully it will be in the final version of whatever bill is passed and sent to the President. Southeastern Fisheries Association is a member of a national seafood coalition working on the development of a fair and honest bill.

CORRODIBLE, NON-STAINLESS HOOKS REQUIRED FOR COM- MERCIAL FISHERMEN

On July 9, 2002, the National Marine Fisheries Service issued a Final Rule to reduce sea turtle bycatch by requiring all commercial vessels permitted to fish for highly migratory species use corrodible, non-stainless hooks to protect sea turtles. If this is such a necessary requirement for a handful of commercial fishing vessels, shouldn't the same rule apply to recreational fishing hooks? Just a cursory review of turtle strandings in Florida alone will show the magnitude of hooks found in the body and stomachs of sea turtles. In some environmental education classes, children are shown x-rays of turtles with many hooks

located in their stomachs. Fishing line is also a major cause of sea turtle mortality and the discarding of monofilament is so pervasive that the Florida Sea Grant program has initiated a volunteer group to pick up the monofilament from the beaches. The first run produced over 2,000 pounds of monofilament fishing line from selected beaches.

BACKDOOR SALES OF RECREATIONAL CAUGHT FISH RAMPANT IN FLORIDA

SFA members call every week complaining of illegal sale of recreational caught fish and no sign of any law enforcement on anglers from either the state or federal law enforcement agencies is apparent. In fact, since the head FWC and NMFS law enforcement people retired several months ago the illegal sale of sport caught fish seems to have been taken from the agenda of the two agencies. SFA realizes this is a very difficult crime to observe and prove but law enforcement agencies should at least, institute an educational program aimed at notifying anglers that it is illegal to sell any fish without the proper permits. Until the Florida Fish & Wildlife Commission and the National Marine Fisheries Service realize the magnitude of this tax dodging activity it will continue to grow. Anyone who sees an illegal seafood sale taking place is urged to call the FWC and NMFS.

NMFS ADMINISTRATOR BILL HOGARTH ADDRESSES COUNCIL ON APPOINTMENTS

Offering no excuses for creating the most unbalanced fishery management council in the nation since the Magnuson-Stevens Act was passed in 1976, Hogarth did say that 5 seats would be up next year and the imbalance would be looked at again at that time. As far as appointing a shrimp aquaculturist Hogarth is said to have stated that imports and aquaculture are high profile issues and the shrimp pond operator would be classified as a commercial seat. WHAT? There is no pond fishery in the federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico EEZ. The US shrimp fishery is the number one fishery in the nation and instead of appointing a qualified person to a seat at the table, the industry was purposefully excluded and a

shrimp importer and aquaculturist was seated at the table to regulate the competition. Joe Hendrix is a good guy. He graduated from an outstanding college in Tallahassee, Florida and he might even be the same Joe Hendrix who lived in Port St. Joe for a time. He is highly competent but he should be serving on a USDA aquaculture committee instead of on a management council regulating wild caught shrimp. Governor Jeb Bush nominated Bob Gill, Shrimp Landings Inc., and a graduate of the US Naval Academy. Bob Gill would have been a knowledgeable person to be seated at the table. From what SFA has been told, the nominees submitted by Governor Bush were not listed preferentially. Even if it had been, one of the checks and balances envisioned by the Magnuson-Stevens Act was for the Secretary of Commerce to use discretion to balance the Councils. If Secretary Evans is going to take the person listed first then why do the Governors send in three names? The only discretion used was to appoint people approved by the Coastal Conservation Association in the opinion of many involved in the fish world. Julius Collins was nominated by Texas Governor Perry and according to the Texas shrimping industry, there was no preferred nominee. Secretary Evans could have appointed a shrimper from Texas but went with a shrimp importer and shrimp pond operator instead.

FLORIDA COMERCIAL FISHERMEN TO FILE CLASS ACTION SUIT AGAINST STATE

Retired Circuit Judge Charles McClure of Tallahassee will head legal efforts to bring justice and fairness for commercial fishermen in Florida. The suit will be filed in federal court and will touch on many issues including civil rights, American Disability Act, equal employment and selective law enforcement. It is estimated at least 15,000 people were adversely affected by the net limitation amendment to the Florida constitution. **Any person who feels they were adversely affected can sign on as a plaintiff for a fee of \$150. Anyone interested in joining this class action suit please contact Ronald Fred Crum at 850/984-5501 for more details. Judge McClure is planning to hold meetings around the state to explain the litigation and to al-**

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low anyone harmed to join the effort.

JOHN MEHOS PASSES

John Mehos, longtime shrimp industry leader who lived in Texas passed away on July 15th after a recent illness and surgery. John served as Chairman of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council during the first three years and leading to the development of a strong and professional Council that lasted for many years. SFA sends it deepest sympathy to the Mehos family and pray that John's soul and the souls of all the faithfully departed, rest in peace.



Captain Eric Schmidt is a bandit and rod & reel fisherman from Fort Myers, Florida, who believes in fairness and justice. The outdoor writer of the Fort Myers News Press is named Byron Stout. Byron has been listed on the masthead of Florida Sportsman magazine and as such I assume he is paid by Karl Wickstrom for his writing skills touting Karl's philosophy of hate-mongering and demonizing of commercial fishermen.

Byron and I have sparred for several decades. I had always hoped he would bring some balance into his columns but alas, he has gone over to the dark side with Ted Forsgren and Karl Wickstrom. The following is a letter to him from Captain Eric. It is self explanatory and should serve as an example of how all of us should respond every time the angler radicals write lies or misinformation. – Bob Jones

(The letter from Captain Eric)

Byron, Byron, Byron,
That was a fine piece of literary propaganda in your paid political CCA column this morning. It was AMAZING. That you penned your independent thoughts about the Gulf Councils actions even before Ted opened his mouth hours after the News-Press hit the newsstands and driveways of Lee County and he said the very same thing that you wrote was amazing. You

must have a gift. I hear that Miss Cleo is losing her psychic network so perhaps there is a job opportunity opening up for you there.

You are LYING to the readers of the News-Press each and every time your column appears filled with your political views. After your March 27th column appeared, I suggested to the editorial board of your newspaper that they move you to the op-ed section of the paper or if your bilge is going to continue to be printed on the front page of the sports section, with relevant, factual news, perhaps your column should come with a disclaimer. I thought it was also interesting that I did not see you in the audience today at the meeting just 80 miles up the road from Ft Myers in Sarasota.

Your constant portrayal of the Gulf Council pandering to the commercial fishing interests disgusts me. This is a lie. There is nothing that the gulf council is considering that even remotely resembles pandering to our industry.

You state in your column today that during the reef fish AP meeting, a commercial fishing coalition voted to move the longliners to 25 fathoms. It's odd once again, that since I am a member of the reef fish AP, and I am the person who made that motion, I didn't see you at that meeting either. It's one thing to read the minutes of a meeting and another to attend the meeting and hear the discussions before motions are made. Are you aware there were charter boat representatives who voted for that motion? Are you also aware that a charter boat representative who sits on the reef fish AP recommended that the recreational bag limit be 3 total grouper and 1 fish of the 3 can be a red grouper? I have

Part of the Education Process of the PUBLIC:

On your next order for business checks from your bank have printed just above the signature line **"Commercial Fishing makes this payment possible"**

not heard anything from you or the CCA about that. That too must be a commercial conspiracy.

Are you aware that even though gag grouper stocks are not over fished nor are undergoing over fishing, the gag stock must be managed to achieve OY and an additional 24% reduction in gag harvest needs to be achieved? This too I'm sure you'll spin into some sort of Gulf Council commercial fishing conspiracy.

You and your cronies at the CCA are filled with hatred for commercial fishing. I went out and spent my commercial fishing generated dollars and purchased a copy of the June issue of Florida Sportsman. The editorials in that magazine and the articles regarding red grouper were so filled with hate. I hope that you people over there with the CCA find some peace in your lives, our time here on earth is a precious gift, and it is a shame to go through our journey here so consumed with hate.

Now it's time for me to tell you what it is that I do. I am a bandit fisherman, not a longline fisherman. I also operate charter boats and party boats in this area on a part-time basis. Had you attended today's public testimony, you would have heard me state that I don't feel what the Council is doing is prudent...that I don't support the reductions for either the recreational, char-

We invite anyone receiving this newsletter, who is not already a member of SFA to join us and become an activist for your business. We are here to respond to your business needs in the state capital and around the Southeast Region. We can help you only if we know you and correspond with you regularly.....We would look forward to serving you and your company!

Welcome to SFA New Members: SFA is proud to welcome the following new members into its growing family of successful seafood companies. we encourage each member to support one another for the overall good of maintaining an economic and cultural presence for commercial fishing in America as well as providing marine protein to the people.

Associate Member:

After Dark Charters upgraded to Associate membership, Harold Croley, Tampa, Florida

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ter or commercial fishery.

While I don't support what the council seeks to do for all that harvest red grouper, you just wish to put my fellow commercial fishermen out of business and re allocate those fish to recreational fishermen. You continually portray our industry as the scourge of the earth. We are the evil-doers of the fish world.

Jeff Weakly editor of Florida Sportsman magazine testified in San Destin Florida that subscriptions for that magazine have remained constant for that over the past 10 years. Why do you think that is? Maybe

the marketplace is telling the publishers that CCA generated crap printed in the magazine is just that, and that they are tired of it.

I'm sure you'll try to spin this letter as that I am a commercial representative of BIG FISH, just like big tobacco or any other conglomerate. In reality, I am a bandit/ rod and reel fishermen who fishes on a 40 foot boat alone. I hold no positions on any commercial fishing organizations either nationally or in the gulf region. Basically I am tired of your propaganda. You lie to your readers.

You have the platform of the media. Soon,

I too will have access to the media reaching far many more people than read your column. So keep in mind, I will read the lies that you and your CCA minions write and I will refute your claims backed up with factual information.

Capt. Eric Schmidt (part of your commercial fishing coalition on the reef fish AP)

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