



SOUTHEASTERN FISHERIES ASSOCIATION

H O T L I N E S

F E B R U A R Y 2 0 0 7

SEAFOOD PRODUCT SUBSTITUTION GETS NATIONAL TRACTION

When the SFA Board of Directors passed a Resolution on December 7, 2006 to work towards stopping seafood product substitution, they had no idea the issue would make newspapers and TV stations all over the country.

One of the main catalysts was investigative work done by Steve Nohlgren of the *St. Petersburg Times*. His first article caught the attention of NPR, other newspapers and TV reporters around the state and as far away as New York and California.



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Katie LaGrone, ABC 7 News in Fort Myers, moved the issue along proving some restaurants in her viewing area knew they were serving ponga for grouper, because invoices and fish boxes were clearly marked ponga, but their menus said grouper. Governor Crist, while he was still Attorney Gen-

eral, launched an extensive investigation and found 17 out of the 24 restaurants subpoenaed were substituting other species for grouper. The association hopes Attorney General McCollum will continue this investigation that will surely help the consumers of seafood products.

The fish substitution issue has appeared in *Seafood Business*, *USA Today*, *the Washington Post*, *Miami Herald*, *Florida Times Union*, *Lakeland Ledger* the *Paul Harvey Show* and numerous other newspapers, radio and TV's around the country.

The problems with packers in some Asian countries will need more oversight from their own government to change their practices. It is not difficult for an unscrupulous packer to put ponga in boxes labeled grouper because the chance of detection by FDA when they are brought into the country is practically nil. If Vietnam was sending in real catfish (*Ictalurus punctatus*) like China is, every single container would be checked by the FDA but ponga, tra, swai and basa don't rise to the level to get FDA's attention.

There are longstanding problems getting FDA fully involved with consumer fraud because it is not a high priority. Very little time and funding are used to stop the cheating occurring everyday in the market place. FDA has

indicated in a letter to NFI their main concern is safety not consumer fraud because of the 911 tragedy.

This is not a criticism of FDA. They have never had the appropriations or manpower to properly inspect imported fishery products. They do inspect a major portion of domestic seafood dealers, but interestingly enough, they can't touch recreational fishermen, who catch and sell giant king mackerel to the public. It is up to Congress to fund FDA and as long as they are under funded then not much help on consumer fraud will be forthcoming from them.

Senator Durbin (D-Ill) has filed a bill to combine all food inspection agencies into one federal department. What a turf battle this will be and we don't know enough about the plan to comment on its merits or problems. But we DO know the present system does not work and too much seafood is brought into the country under one name and is sold to the consumers under another name.

Has anyone reading this Newsletter ever seen ponga or pangasius on a menu? Millions of pounds come into the US each year, so what species is it sold for? Does grouper come to mind?

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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55TH ANNUAL MEETING SHAPING UP

SFA's 55th Annual Meeting will be held at the St. Petersburg Hilton on **May 16-18** in beautiful downtown St. Petersburg, Florida. An outstanding lineup of speakers will discuss electronic trip ticket opportunities, software solutions for traceability and inventory control, product substitution



and latest progress in DNA work. Dr. Joanne Brown, Deputy Commissioner of the Florida Department of Agriculture

and Consumer Services will give an in depth presentation on the impact of a bird flu pandemic, what steps we can all take to reduce our risks should one occur and the possible effects on the seafood industry. We have asked for a representative from the Attorney General's office to give a report as well as many others who have important impacts on our businesses.

Also working on a special event at the USF/ FFWMRI Complex. Mark your calendars and come to the annual meeting and have fellowship with the rest of the survivors. We need your participation. The industry needs your participation. Give yourself a break and set aside the time. The work will always be there.

GULF GROUPEL CLOSED FEBRUARY 15 TO MARCH 15

How much grouper will be landed and sold during the 30 day closed season? How many places will still be offering FRESH Gulf grouper after the fishery has been closed for a week or so? How many will use the excuse that the grouper comes from the east coast or it isn't black, red or gag grouper?

By and large the 30 day closure is be-

ing accepted by the professional fishermen and many charter boat owners. Not all charter boat owners are happy and one in Bradenton said when asked about the closure, "the whole problem with the grouper is longliners".

Longliners produce mostly red grouper and that fishery is NOT classified as overfished. Anglers catch mostly gag and that fishery IS classified as overfished. What does that indicate?

Everyone who fishes has an impact on the resource.

Will all users ever be able to come to the table and discuss some hard issues without savaging the other guy? There surely won't be any attempt to bring the groups together until there is a willingness to talk and meet in a civil manner. SFA is willing to do its part to bring everyone together but there must be preplanning and agreement on a common agenda to be tightly followed, hopefully through a professional mediator.



SEAFOOD INDUSTRIAL PARK IN APALACHICOLA SCRAPPED

The Florida House committee overseeing the budget has cut out all Community Based Projects which included 1.5 million dollars to build a Seafood Park in Franklin County. **Representative Will Kendrick** (R-Franklin Co. et al) filed the bill to help the struggling fisheries community. Infrastructure loss is one of the major problems facing the Florida seafood industry and this legislative proposal would have been of great help to all the businesses in Franklin depending on the production of seafood. Pinellas County also has a need for an industrial park, because of the high value of the land where the grouper fishery is located. This will not happen without government involvement not only from a financial point of view but governmental assistance in making sure all environmental

regulations are met. We must address these issues for many reasons, one of which is being able to supply fresh seafood if our imported food supply is curtailed or threatened.

KEEPING SEAFOOD BUSINESS OPEN AT PORT CANAVERAL - A REAL CHALLENGE

SFA has been working in conjunction with others over the past several months, attempting to help Cape Canaveral Seafood maintain an affordable presence at Port Canaveral because of all the security regulations in place. Presently, only the shrimp unloading area at **ONE** seafood company will come under the stringent regulations, including fencing and security guards. Other requirements that are part of the Port security plan will not be discussed publicly. The Port is very security conscious and doesn't even keep minutes of their meetings with tenants. We have had great assistance from the legislative delegation in Brevard County and some help from the Port officials. FDLE has tried to be as helpful as possible but are constrained to a degree by state and federal law.

SFA has a philosophical problem with some regulations, particularly for vessels that are already required to install and maintain a vessel monitoring system 24/7, which is closely monitored by the federal government (NMFS).

Also, other commercial activities are taking place adjacent to the shrimp facility, yet no other business comes under these state laws. It is only being applied to the commercial fishing sector, while charter and private boats offer the same security risk as a slow moving shrimp vessel.

There is a fairness issue here. Hopefully the Port and the seafood company can work out a fair way to provide security on a common basis and keep the

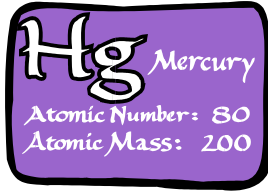
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targeted seafood business financially competitive with others in the same venue.

ALASKA'S WARNING ABOUT MERCURY UNSETTLING

Alaska's new administration is poised to use EPA mercury guidelines, which if imposed would stop most of the seafood products in the US from being sold.



Proper guidelines have been issued by the US Food and Drug Administration. FDA is in charge of U.S. food supply and their determination to use 1 PPM is backed up by stringent science and a built in safety factor far higher than many foods. Why the Governor's advisors suggest the EPA guidelines instead of the FDA guidelines is a mystery.

50/50 DRAWING TICKETS TO BE DISTRIBUTED

SFA will be asking its members to purchase and/or sell tickets for the 50/50 Drawing held each year at the convention. This is instead of asking for special voluntary contributions for association funding short-falls.



Please participate as we only print 200 tickets which means \$10,000 could be divided for 1st, 2nd and 3rd

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prize and \$10,000 into SFA's general fund. The odds are good. The reason for doing it is timely so please help your industry.

*IT IS VITALLY IMPORTANT THAT IF YOU SHOULD RECEIVE A TICKET AND DO NOT WISH TO PARTICIPATE, THAT YOU **RETURN** THE TICKET TO THE OFFICE ASAP SO WE CAN SELL IT TO SOMEONE ELSE. YOU WILL HAVE A PREPAID RETURN ENVELOPE TO DO SO.*

BIRD FLU AND THE SEAFOOD INDUSTRY

Some folks say a bird flu pandemic is like global warming, just a far out possibility with the jury still out. Global warming seems to be moving slowly in human time, but rather quickly in geologic time, if in fact much of the polar cap is melting and the other signs are proven

Bird flu on the other hand is happening, thankfully at a very slow rate with just a few hundred people dead from it so far. The virus has not mutated to the

point of transmission from human to human and if/when that happens the consequences will be mind boggling.



The federal government has budgeted several billion dollars in preparation for the possibility and many states are also setting aside funds. Florida has an aggressive program and is working through the Department of Management Services which is in direct contact with local officials and all EMS providers in the state.

Dr. Joanne Brown, Deputy Commissioner of the Florida Department of Agriculture will conduct a brief workshop of bird flu during the annual convention in St. Petersburg. It is a session you don't want to miss. In a pandemic or any major disaster, food supply becomes critical after a few days. What plan does the state have for us? Do you have a COB plan? COB means CONTINUITY OF BUSINESS in the event

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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!

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of a disaster. Everyone should and Dr. Brown will discuss this in her workshop on May 18. Why not make plans now to be in St. Pete on May 17-18?

SFA WEBSITE COMING BACK ON LINE

The SFA web site has been under construction for some time now and is now back in service. We are going to archive most of the articles and then try to keep news important to the seafood industry on the front page. We are looking for some advertising in order to recover the cost of operating the web site in a professional manner. If you are interested in some good exposure throughout the country and the world, give us a call and let's work out

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

- ◆ Computer Associates, Inc.: Smithfield, Rhode Island, *Tom Spillane*, Director of Marketing.

Retail Market/Restaurant Member:

- ◆ DanMar Seafood, Inc. : Dade City, Florida: *Danny Cuesta*, President, *Scott Cuesta*, Sales
- ◆ Wild Pacific Seafood: Titusville, FL.; *Joshua Bode*
- ◆ Hernando Beach Seafood: Spring Hill, FL. *Ronnie DuMelle*; Owner / *Donny DuMelle*; Manager

a way to put your name and services on our site. The web site address is:

www.southeasternfish.org



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Serving the Commercial Fishing Industry for over 50 years



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