

**GMP Management Committee
Charge to the
Project Team on Consumption Advisories
For
Mercury in Gulf Marine Fish**

Background

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Program Office developed a report entitled, "A Survey of the Occurrence of Mercury in the Fishery Resources of the Gulf of Mexico," which was released in January, 2000 and updated in September 2001. This report made the following recommendations:

Future tissue monitoring should be coordinated on a Gulfwide basis for a defined subset of species (and an associated defined set of size classes).

An acceptable means of collecting and analyzing samples for migratory, pelagic species taken in federal waters needs to be identified and implemented to provide an adequate understanding of mercury levels in these fish.

More consistent fish length information (or some other agreed-upon parameter) should be collected by regional monitoring programs. Fish length is not documented in a consistent manner across or within species in the Gulfwide Mercury in Tissue Database.

There are minimal data for several popular recreational species, including dolphin, red snapper, white grunt, greater amberjack, and yellowfin tuna. Monitoring programs may want to consider collecting additional samples for these species.

Of the species analyzed in this study, red drum and black drum, both very popular recreational catches, stand out with relatively high maximum site and sample values (see Tables 13 and 15, respectively). It might be prudent to investigate further mercury contamination in these fishes. Drawing from experience gained in developing advisories for king mackerel, monitoring programs may also want to investigate further the relationship between mercury concentration and size in these fishes.

Realizing that local information is a critical part of the decision-making process, Gulf States may want to investigate a given species for mercury contamination and potential health risks, where consumption advisories exist for that species in another Gulf State. For example, consumption advisories exist only in Florida for spotted seatrout, Spanish mackerel, gafftopsail catfish, and all species of shark.

This study identified only 3 recent seafood consumption studies conducted in coastal areas, and all 3 were conducted in Louisiana. To support future public health risk assessments, a better understanding of seafood consumption patterns among coastal populations of the Gulf of Mexico is needed.

As a result of these findings and recent press coverage concerning elevated fish tissue concentrations, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is planning to sample and analyze about 2500 samples of pelagic fish from the Gulf of Mexico for mercury. The GMPO is supporting this work through a \$51,000 interagency agreement.

Currently, all five Gulf States have issued fish consumption advisories for king mackerel based on mercury. However, there are some key differences among the States in their advisories. As a result of the NMFS survey, there may be a need for additional advisories for other species. Reaching agreement on a common approach to developing and issuing these advisories across the five Gulf States would help reduce public confusion resulting from conflicting advice.

In November 2001, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission adopted a resolution directing staff to work with the GMP to convene a Steering Committee to develop recommendations on the need for a Gulfwide plan for the coordinated collection of data and public outreach needs concerning mercury. The Steering Committee completed development of an interim report which was presented to the Commission in March 2002. That report confirms the need for additional sampling and recommends that:

"The Gulf of Mexico Program should work with the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission to facilitate appropriate state and federal agency representatives to consider establishing consistent seafood consumption advisories and establishing common advisory levels for mercury in the tissue of pelagic fish from the waters of the northern Gulf of Mexico."

Purpose

The Management Committee recommends that the Gulf of Mexico Program Office (GMPO) form a Project Team on Consumption Advisories for Mercury in Gulf Marine Fish. The purpose of this Team is to develop recommendations for consumption advisories, as needed, for mercury in marine fish from the Gulf of Mexico that are consistent in all five States bordering the Gulf. The Team is expected to evaluate all aspects of consumption advisories, identify areas of consistency and inconsistency, and develop consensus recommendations on appropriate ways to address inconsistencies. Furthermore, the Team is expected to develop a model consumption advisory based on the recommendations and propose a public outreach plan for appropriately communicating mercury risks in Gulf seafood to the public, including effective means for disseminating the advisories to the public.

This work will serve to meet the GMP sub-objective 2(B)(2): Establish technical work group, composed of State and Federal agencies and in cooperation with nongovernment interests, to evaluate current Gulf State approaches to setting fish consumption advisories for methylmercury and to develop compatible fish consumption advisories for important commercial and recreational marine and estuarine species.

Timeframe

The Project Team, once convened, should develop work plan with appropriate activities and milestones and submit it to the GMPO for subsequent review by the Management Committee. As a guide the Team should strive to complete its work and present its final recommendations to the Management Committee within one year. If after meeting and reviewing this Charge the Team determines that either less time or additional time is needed, then this should be reflected in the work plan and recommended to the Management Committee for consideration.

Team Membership

The following agencies and organizations should be represented with the expectation that additional experts may be invited to participate as needed to address key issues:

State Agencies

Gulf State Health Departments and other agencies as appropriate to each State
Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission

Federal Agencies

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (Office of Water, Region 4, Region 6, and GMPO)
FDA (Office of Seafood)
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (National Marine Fisheries Service)
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Nongovernment Organizations

Gulf Business Coalition
Coastal Conservation Association
Southeastern Fisheries Association
Citizens Advisory Committee representatives

**Proposed Members of the Gulf of Mexico Program Project Team on
Consumption Advisories for Mercury in Gulf Marine Fish**

Gulf States

Florida

George Henderson, FMRI
Tom Atkenson, FDEP
Donald M. Axelrad, FDEP
Joe Sekerke, Dept of Health

Alabama

Neal Sass, ADPH
Fred Leslie, ADEM

Mississippi

Bruce Brackin, MDPH
Henry Folmar, MDEQ
Tom Van Devender, MS DMR

Louisiana

Chris Roberie/Chris Piehler, LA DEQ
Diane Dugas/Robert Robert Starszak/Shannon Soileau, LA DHH
Glen Thomas/Gary Tilyou, LA DWF
William Hartley, Tulane University, LA DHH consultant

Texas

Kirk Wiles, TDH
Steve Twidwell, TNRCC

Other State

Sea Grant - LaDon Swann MASGC
GSMFC - Ron Lukens

Federal Agencies

EPA Region 4 - Jerry Stober
EPA Region 6 - Phil Crocker
EPA HQ - Jeff Bigler
FDA - Tom Herrington
NOAA-N M FS - Spencer Garrett
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council - Jeff Rester
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry - Chris DeRosa

Private Sector

Southeastern Fisheries Association - Bob Jones, Director, Tallahassee
Gulf Business Coalition - Flinda Hill, Mississippi Power
Coastal Conservation Association - DeGraff Adams
Citizens Advisory Committee representative - Jim Kachtick
Mobile Bay Watch, Inc. - Casi Callaway

GMP Communications Committee Representatives

MS-AL Seagrass Consortium - Tim Reid
Mobile Bay NEP - Lee Yokel
Sherwin Aluminum Corp. - Tom Ballou
Mid-Continent Oil & Gas Assoc. - Larry Wall