



# THE FISHIN' INSIDER

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This horse has been flogged so hard and often I'm surprised there's any hide left to beat on much less a carcass. The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and NOAA/NMFS held a pow-wow at the Omni hotel in Austin half a moon ago. Not sure which sucked more, the meet or cedar fever but if you get up to that area, go chow down at the Paggi House cuz the grub is fabulous even if you're unfashionably late.

Most of ya'll are aware of the rather messy abortion Uncle Sugar has made of snapper management. Well they're still at it though now about the only thing left protruding from the sand is a couple of gnarly feet. The good news is that the Council, supported by some seasick economists are gonna leave the total allowable catch at 9.12 million pounds rather than meet the demands of some well represented enviro's to have the critters added to the endangered species list. While I was snoozing through the debate over the wording of some damned tedious amendments to the Magnuson-Stevenson Act, better known as Reef Fish Amendment 22, I was struck by the lack of advocates in attendance, other than some shrimpers and the enviro's. The only organization that I'm aware of to give public testimony at the session was the Recreational Fishing Alliance represented by Jim Smarr from Rockport. Here's what he had to say:

Four years ago Texas recreational anglers came before this council to ask for a winter fishery for red snapper in the western Gulf of Mexico. There have been attempts to move toward a solution as far as giving Texas a winter fishery. These attempts have fallen on deaf ears at the council level and at the National Marine Fisheries level. Texas has only one fishery in winter off the Texas coast and it is red snapper. The eastern

gulf has many species to fish for during the winter. Not allowing a fair and equitable fishery between the east and west Gulf of Mexico is a clear violation of one of the ten standards of the Magnuson Act. Mortality in the western Gulf is much higher than in the eastern Gulf, therefore another violation of the Magnuson Act as in reducing discards as much as possible. I remember an 18" minimum size limit on red snapper that killed untold numbers of fish to satisfy the needs of the eastern Gulf as far as regulatory discards. The shrimping effort has been exaggerated by 30% in the model along with the recreational effort being exaggerated. Texas has asked for a separate fishing zone for years. The studies sponsored by Solomon Ortiz, our congressman through the Marfin program show reason for splitting the Gulf and allowing Texas a separate zone. These studies show slower growth rates, slower growth to maturity, higher mortality rates along with some variances in genetic markers. It has taken three years to get these studies implemented. In light of the new data available, Texas wants a separate zone. Should NOAA/NMFS not act, the Texas fishermen have no alternative other than going to Federal court to correct



**Nice catch!**

this injustice. The Texas chapter of the Recreational Fishing Alliance will support this legal action. Time is short as we have been economically devastated due to the winter closure.

During the hour and a half lunch break, Wayne Swingle the executive director of the Council and Roy Crabtree the staff scientist snagged Jim and had a chat about his intent of hauling the collective before Judge Hayden Head again up in Corpus, I'll get to that next week.

***We welcome your fishin' photos. Drop them by 2600 Padre Boulevard on the Island, or mail them to I.B. Hooked, c/o Coastal Current Weekly, P.O.Box 2429, South Padre Island, Texas 78597. Be sure to include the name of the angler, weight and type of fish, where caught, and name of boat if applicable. Photos with SASE will be returned.***