



THE FISHIN' INSIDER

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After last week's visit through the looking glass via the rabbit warren of fishery and political bureaucracy/ skullduggery, which caused this column to be pulled, the last few days have shed some diffused light on the snapper subject. Murky though it still is, I don't think Fearless Leader's old office will be fire bombed. If it is, the landlord has great insurance and we'll have a hell of a firewall in the new digs.

First I'd like to synopsise some comments made by locals at a public hearing at the Port Misrable High School lecture hall and by the way, beware of the spring loaded chairs cuz it can be a long way to the floor:

Phil Calo, Osprey Charters: The problem we have with your regulations is that you're ignoring the fact that the Texas fishery is far different from Florida. In the wintertime about the only species we can consistently target is red snapper and amberjack. But to get to the amberjacks you have to get through the snapper, so you're forcing us to kill and discard a huge amount of red snapper. My customers get mad at us because of the waste of the resource and all we can do is point our fingers at some phantom regulators. My boats do well in the spring, summer and early fall because we can drift fish for kings, tuna and anything else that shows up as well as bottom fish, but in the winter time we have to bottom fish. In Florida they can fish kings and tuna year round as well as dorado. I have boat payments to make not to mention a payroll every month. I like to keep my crews together but the way you guys are running things I can't afford to, you guys are killing us.

Matt Murphy, Murphy's Fishing Charters: I've been in the charter business for over forty years. I've sat on your advisory panels at my own expense in years past. I've never seen anything like what you're doing to this fishery in my life. There are studies dating back to the seventies on snapper mortality and physiology. They are conclusive that



Thomas "Buckey" Rich named after the infamous Buckey Ball of Buckminster Fuller - the deckhand of the future.

when a snapper develops a swim bladder, which is when they reach about thirteen inches, the mortality rate is close to 100% when they're pulled up in over ninety feet of water. The fishery in the western Gulf of Mexico off of South Texas is a deep-water fishery; the depth we find fish in is between 70 feet and 200 feet. Those fish will die when caught and brought to the surface by any means. You have studies that prove this beyond any reasonable doubt, yet you ignore them. Why? Is it politics between Florida and the rest of the Gulf Coast? Do you really care about what you are forcing us and the commercial fishermen to do to this resource to make a living? You are managing this fishery subjectively, not objectively like real fishery managers would do.

Tony Riesinger, Sea Grant: I was disappointed that the Reef Fish Amendment barely paid lip service to the socio-economic impact on fishing communities as required under the National Standards; a page and a half out of several hundred pages. This needs to be addressed on the Gulf Council level as well as NOAA-Fisheries level because your policies are creating real damage.

Wellll, I guess you may be getting an idea of the portrait being painted by these snippets. I'll continue next week but I'll end with a brief synopsis of a conversation I had today with Dr. Roy Crabtree, NOAA-Fisheries rep to the Gulf Council: The plan is to stick with the process started in 1999. The new red snapper stock assessment should be ready by the end of the year. Most all of the points should be ready for discussion by the time the Gulf Council meets on South Padre Island in mid-November.

Runnin' out of space so see ya.

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.