



THE FISHIN' INSIDER

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I guess this'll be the umpteenth update on the goings on in the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council and please bare with me on this cuz it is important and it will, down the road, affect yall's ability to fish for red snapper. In the last ten years the red snapper fishery has become the most regulated fish population in the Gulf, virtually all the regs adopted have been by a majority vote on the council. Until a couple of weeks ago, the reps from Florida, Alabama and Mississippi had an iron grip on any proposed changes to any fishery management plan. A bomb went off on June 7th at the council meeting in Tampa when Texas once again proposed a plan amendment with the idea of splitting the Gulf into east and west management zones for red snapper. The difference this time was that Robin Riechers of Texas Parks & Wildlife is the new chair of the council. Judging by the reaction by the council staff and the NMFS staff this came out of left field; they were stunned. Chairman Riechers immediately asked for a second and Dr. Bob Shipp, chair of Marine Sciences at the University of South Alabama made the second. With the help of Alabama and Louisiana the motion passed and the NMFS and council staffs are now preparing the document.

I was sittin' next to Jim Smarr, chair of the Texas Chapter of the Recreational Fishing Alliance and apparently he hadn't been tipped off on what was about to go down. After a moment of incredulity and a few expletives it was high five time under the withering stares of the enviros, most of the staff and especially the Florida gang. A knock out with the Ocean Conservancy that I'd met the evening before after she'd given an eloquent if ill-informed plea for the council to save the red snapper slid over hissed a serious negative and I asked her if she'd read the Shipp-Minton letter that was introduced at the previous meeting and she said no, so I told her to read it before passing judgment. Ain't seen nor heard from her since but damn did she look good stormin' off.

The genesis of this tectonic shift was unavoidable after Dr. Shipp and Dr. Vernon Minton head of the marine resources with the State of Alabama, both voting members on the council co-authored a letter that was more than a little critical of the science and methodology used in the most recent red snapper stock assessment. We ran that letter in this column about a month ago; unfortunately this rag is so chincy with space it came out in microscopic form. You'd of needed a damn good magnifying glass to read it but

I do believe there are copies available at the rag's offices, hopefully.

The gist of the letter takes Dr. Roy Crabtree NMFS rep on the council to task over the science used and the methodology used in the latest stock assessment. This is the one that recommends the total allowable catch to be reduced from 9.12 million pounds to around 5 million pounds in the commercial and recreational sector. The letter has so far been ignored by Roy and his staff, a mistake that came back to bite 'um in Tampa. In the letter they felt compelled to point out to Roy and his staff that "It is a basic tenant of ecology, recognized from the days of Charles Darwin, that the vast majority of natural populations of marine organisms are habitat/resource limited. The point they'd hoped to drive home is that the methodology used by he and his people still failed to take this in to account in their modeling, the explosion since the 50's in new habitat created by the oil and gas industry.

Since I'm getting' into magnifying glass range on this crap I'll continue it next week but a change is comin' and it could be good or it could be bad knowin' these guys; shortly they'll be askin' for public comment. Ya'll need to give it too' um.

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.