

Meeting Summary

Shrimp and Deepwater Shrimp Advisory Panel Meeting

Hilton Garden Inn, Charleston, SC

April 16, 2015

1. Review of the NMFS Shrimp Biological Opinion (Attachment 1a - 1b)

Jenny Lee, NMFS Protected Resources, presented an overview of the findings of the NMFS Biological Opinion (BiOp) for the Southeast Shrimp Fishery that was released in 2014. The BiOp covered penaeid shrimp fisheries in the South Atlantic and the rock shrimp fishery.

After the presentation by Jenny Lee, the Shrimp AP discussed several points in the biological opinion. The AP noted that the 3% mortality capture rate for sea turtles seemed high for the South Atlantic and that not all interactions were the same. NMFS developed a point matrix for TED compliance to address the differences in the potential infractions to induce mortality. Some infractions such as sewing a TED closed would receive a much higher rating than a slightly bent bar in the TED. Most of violations that have been observed recently are in the lower tier of point matrix.

The AP stated the NOAA Office of Law Enforcement and Gear Management Team inspections are good and have been consistent and that fishermen should have their gear inspected before starting for the season. This can reduce the potential for a violation.

The AP recommended calibration for comparing at sea observers and dockside observations and for the addition of state enforcement inspections. The state inspections should be treated separately until it is verified there is no difference.

The group then discussed some of the reasonable and prudent measures. There was some concern about NMFS's ability to meet the reasonable and prudent measures given their current budget constraints.

The AP indicated that fishermen were starting to use reduced bar spacing TEDs. The NMFS OPR website has been improved and is a great source of information.

(http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/protected_resources/sea_turtle_protection_and_shrimp_fisheries/index.html) The AP requested a smalltooth sawfish safe handling practice document similar to the turtle safe handling practices be developed and use the GMT to train the fishermen.

Overall the AP felt the shrimpers were doing a good job protecting ESA listed species but their industry was still being viewed negatively by some environmental groups. The group discussed the lawsuit brought by Oceana but little was known since it was released the day before.

2. Review of the SEDAR Shrimp Procedural Workshop (Attachment 2a - 2b)

Julia Byrd, SEDAR Staff, reviewed the findings of the SEDAR Procedural Workshop. The SEDAR Shrimp Procedural Workshop was designed to discuss two topics: shrimp stock assessment and bycatch estimation of managed species in shrimp fisheries for use in stock assessments.

The AP provided input on when certain aspects of the fishery changed. The number of tows per day has decreased, the number of crew per vessel has decreased, and the number of permit holders has decreased. This has dropped the landings and effort in the fishery. They recommended developing a questionnaire that could be sent to the fishermen to have better coverage of the fishery. The AP indicated that all fields on trip tickets should be mandatory (at least those that deal with catch and effort), there is a need for improved communication with fish houses on how to fill out trip tickets so dealers know importance of data and the potential impact, and standardized data fields for the trip ticket among states are needed to improve consistency in the data collected.

The AP expressed concern for the whiting fishery which had a noticeable decline. They were also concerned about beach renourishment, housing development, pollutants, water quality, and deepening harbors and their impacts on the shrimp fishery.

3. Update on the Oculina Evaluation Team Report

Chip Collier, Council Staff, presented discussion points in the Oculina Evaluation Report. The Oculina Evaluation Report will be presented to the Scientific and Statistical Committee meeting in April 2015 for approval as best science. In June, the report will be presented to the Council. The OET had recommended against a shrimp access area. The shrimp AP noted that the OECA and OHAPC had an extra mile buffer and that should be revisited to get more shrimping area.

4. Status Update of Coral Amendment 8

Chip Collier, Council Staff, gave a status update on Coral Amendment 8. Publication of the Final Rule for Coral Amendment 8 was still pending. The economic analysis of the regulation change for the increased ping was revised. It was discovered that the VMS units did not have to be replaced to comply with the increased ping rate.

The Shrimp AP noted that the northern end of the expansion was a highly productive area used by a few fishermen. They typically dragged out pre-VMS because the shrimp were thicker near the edges. Many fishermen avoided the offshore area due to amount of cable needed or issues with tides. The fishermen that fish for royal red shrimp are typically the same fishermen that are going to be impacted by this amendment. Tow times are usually three hours with three tows per night from June to November at 2 to 3.5 knots. Fishermen were going to provide tow level information to Mike Merrifield by June for the June Council meeting.

The Shrimp AP also discussed the proposed Eubelena Oculina Marine Sanctuary. There was some concern that shrimpers would not be allowed in the area if it were a sanctuary and the AP made a motion against the development of a marine sanctuary off the Florida coast. The Oculina area has doubled in length with Coral Amendment 8 and right whales are protected through MMPA and ESA. The AP felt the shrimp bottom needs to be protected. There was some discussion about developing a rock shrimp access area. The rock shrimpers were going to discuss this as a group and potentially come back to the Shrimp AP or to the Council with a request.

Motion 1: The Shrimp and Deepwater Shrimp APs do not support any future attempts that creates the Eubelena Oculina Sanctuary off the east coast of Florida. (8/0)

5. TED Compliance Meeting

The Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation put together a TED compliance workshop was held in March 2015. The group felt this was very productive for everyone involved. One recommendation that came from the meeting was to share the responsibility and culpability of infractions to the boat captain. Currently tickets are written to the boat owner and they might not be aware of modifications that occur offshore. This has the potential to decrease infractions. The group also recommended developing more consistent guidelines for enforcement officers. The new TED enforcement sheet should help to increase consistency among officers and agencies.

Final note was to have the vessels inspected by the USCG Safety Officer by October 14.