

**MENHADEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES
Tuesday, October 17, 2023
New Orleans, LA**

APPROVED BY: 
COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

In the absence of Chairman, **Mroch, Alhale** (NOAA) called the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m. with the following in attendance.

Members

Sydney Alhale, NOAA Fisheries, Miami, FL (virtual)
Peter Himchak, Omega Protein, Tuckerton, NJ
Jason Adriance, LDWF, New Orleans, LA
Ben Landry, Ocean Fleet Services, Abbeville, LA
Matt Hill, MDMR, Biloxi, MS
Jason Walker, Daybrook Fisheries, Empire, LA
John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Dauphin Island, AL
Chris Swanson, FWC, St. Petersburg, FL
Carey Gelpi, TPWD, Port Arthur, TX

Others

Rebecca Hazelkorn, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL (virtual)
Scott Raborn, LGL Ecological Research Associates, Inc., Bryan, TX (virtual)
Amy Schueller, NOAA Fisheries, Beaufort, NC (virtual)
Peter Mudrak, LGL Ecological Research Associates, Inc., Bryan, TX (virtual)
Lewis Naisbett-Jones, LGL Ecological Research Associates, Inc., Bryan, TX (virtual)
Elizabeth Stratton, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL (virtual)
Robert Leaf, USM GCRL, Ocean Springs, MS
Shane Treadaway, Westbank Fishing, Empire, LA
Jaclyn Higgins, TRCP, Washington D.C.
Rick Burris, MDMR, Biloxi, MS

Staff

David Donaldson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS
Keith Wilson, GSMFC, Ocean Springs, MS

Adoption of Agenda

Alhale reviewed the agenda. **VanderKooy** suggested moving the #10 LGL Bycatch Study presentation up on the agenda to follow item #5 Atlantic Menhaden Update. Without objection, the modified agenda was adopted.

Approval of Minutes (March 31, 2023 – online)

VanderKooy had previously sent draft minutes from the March 31, 2023 virtual meeting, which were reviewed. No changes or edits; without objection, the minutes were approved.

Review of 2023 Gulf Menhaden Season

Alhale, NOAA, provided a review of the 2023 season to date. Through September, the industry has landed almost 416,000 mt, an 8.3% decrease from 2022 and on par with the five-year average. The highest

landings were in May (highest in recent years) and July. Despite this being a strong El Niño year, only three significant tropical systems have entered the Gulf for 2023. TS Arlene wandered through the mid-Gulf the first week of June; TS Harold struck southern Texas in mid-August; and Hurricane Idalia made landfall in Florida in late August. All three systems reduced effort in June and August due to associated winds, however, effort was slightly up overall compared to 2022. A total of 26 steamers and 6 run boats participated in the Gulf fishery so far this year. Based on previous years, the season end for 2023 is predicted to be around 450,000 mt of menhaden landed for reduction. With all things staying the same, the forecast for the 2024 landings will be around 423,000 mt.

Alhale reported that the aging of 2022 port samples is nearly complete. They are still receiving 2023 samples and anticipate having them complete in time for the assessment around April 2024.

Update on the Atlantic Menhaden Fishery

Alhale, NOAA, provided a short report on the 2023 Atlantic fishing season. The Reedville plant received 77,138 mt through September, a decrease of almost 9% compared to 2022 (25% down from the five-year average). Seven vessels operated for reduction along with two snapper bait boats, which did unload a small amount at the plant. The highest landings were in July and August (similar to recent trends). Coastwide, no bait closures in 2023 (to date) from Maine to Virginia. The Atlantic assessment is underway for the multi-species, and the single-species will begin soon. Both assessments will be brought to their Advisory Board in 2025.

Louisiana Purse Seine Bycatch Study

Raborn, LGL Ecological Research Associates, Inc., provided a short overview of their bycatch study for 2024 in the Gulf Menhaden fleet. The team recently completed a pilot study to configure sampling protocols on run boats. The run boats are acting as steamers utilizing the purse boats from another primary steamer to effectively 'pump and go'. The advantage of the run boat is having a significantly less crew, and therefore, more space. The rear deck is used to keep holding tanks and sampling gear. The team utilized direct observation with personnel on the vessels, cameras at key points to view the pumping, and specialized gear to directly quantify the non-target species in the net at the end of the pumping. They will be estimating the quantity of bycatch species (by weight and number of individuals) and estimating species-specific size (length and weight) distributions, as well as sex ratios when possible. Four primary locations for sampling bycatch include: 1) at the large fish excluder, 2) in the retained catch in the hold, 3) in the net rollover at the end of pumping, and 4) through the dewatering outflow. They have derived methods to directly sample at all four locations and will also utilize video. In addition, mortality rates will be determined by holding experiments and dart tagging fish released alive from the vessels.

Report on Texas Cap for 2023

Gelpi, TPWD, reported on the Texas Cap for 2023. No sets were made in Texas waters in 2023.

Review of Port Sample Acquisition and Processing in 2023 and 2024

VanderKooy reported on port sampling efforts in 2023. The samplers have been targeting 300 samples per plant yet not reaching those goals in recent years. Since the industry was using run boats now as "pump and go" rather than pumping out of the other vessels hold, they were now being sampled as regular steamers at-sea and at pump out. This should also improve the number of sets being sampled in 2024.

Menhaden Reference Points and Stock Assessment Update

VanderKooy provided a draft summary from the third Menhaden Reference Points workshop and discussed the timeline for the coming Stock Assessment Update. He and **Schueller** indicated that state FID should be sent during January with the dependent data expected to be available in April. A preliminary

run will be conducted. And, several conference calls will be set over the late spring and summer to work through the assessment. A draft report will be ready for the MAC by the October 2024 meeting and provided to the TCC for review in November 2024.

DWH Restoration Project: Developing Methods to Observe Sea Turtle Interactions in the Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Purse Seine Fishery

Hazelkorn, NMFS, shared some results from the DWH Restoration Project to develop *Methods to Observe Sea Turtle Interactions in the Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Purse Seine Fishery*. This work began in 2021 and should be completed in 2024. The proof of concept pilot was completed in 2021. Researchers determined after the proof of concept and first pilot year, human observers and drones were not feasible methods to observe interactions due to proximity of nets and purse vessels to the pump out area. Electronic monitoring proved successful in being able to document interactions with both sea turtles and marine mammals. Disposition varied upon release. And, results will help develop best practices to decrease impacts on sea turtles and marine mammals.

Marine Stewardship Certification of Gulf Menhaden Updates

Himchak updated the MAC on audit results from Marine Stewardship Certification of the Gulf Menhaden fishery. Some items remain that the industry would like to address as part of this audit including a MAC or Commission statement regarding goals and objectives for the fishery. **Himchak** had provided a white paper developed by the industry for discussion by the MAC. The proposal from **Himchak** was for the MAC to re-affirm the goals and objectives from the last FMP (2015), which MSC believes to be out-of-date. The MAC was unsure how to proceed since the white paper was not generated by the MAC. **VanderKooy** asked would a motion by the MAC stating the existing goals and objectives from the 2015 FMP and the last assessment update (GDAR03) be adequate to satisfy the industry's needs for MSC. It was not clear if that would work. *The white paper was tabled, and the MAC agreed new goals and objectives would likely be established next year as part of the next assessment (GDAR04), which might satisfy the client audit by MSC. The MAC will discuss this more during the virtual meeting in March.*

Himchak reported the industry is continuing work on the Harvest Control Rule (HCR). He asked the state agency reps for updated FID to extend the annual index in the HCR portal developed by Leaf and Catherine Wilhelm at USM. State reps agreed to provide seine and gillnet data. Still, there is a need to determine how the data would be presented outside of the state agencies and industry, and if other stakeholders would or would not be allowed access the portal. **Himchak** hopes to make the portal operational in 2024.

Other Business

VanderKooy will email the assessment timeline to the MAC after the meeting.

*There being no further business, Landry moved to adjourn, Gelpi seconded.
The meeting adjourned 4:58 p.m.*