**MINUTES CRAB TASK FORCE MEETING**

**December 08, 2011**

**Call to Order/Roll Call**

The Crab Task Force meeting was called to order by Vice-Chairman Pete Peterson at 1307 p.m.

A roll call was then made:

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| **VOTING** |  | **NON-VOTING** |  |
| Gary Bauer |  | Mark Benfield |  |
| Pete Gerica | X | Carl Britt | X |
| Dennis Landry | X | Melissa Daigle |  |
| Roy Meek |  | Julie Anderson | X |
| Pete Peterson | X | Walter Keithly |  |
| L.J. Sandras |  | David Lavergne | X |
| Pat Templet | X | Jeff Mayne |  |
| Keith Watts | X |  |  |
| Trudy Luke | X |  |  |
| Rodney Parfait | X |  |  |
| Kim Alfonso |  |  |  |

A quorum of 7 voting members was present.

Adoption of Minutes and Agenda

Keith Watts moved and Dennis Landry seconded that “the minutes and the agenda be approved as written” -- motion carried (all in favor).

**Public Input**

Mrs. Men T. Cao announced the formation of Southeast Asian Fisher Folk.

**Selected Trends in Blue Crab Harvesting, Processing and Imports**

Dr. Jack Isaacs, LDWF Economist, made a presentation on “Selected Trends in Blue Crab Harvesting, Processing and Imports.” The presentation began by outlining historical landings data broken down by month. It was shown that blue crabs accounted for approximately one-half of the national crab harvest annually and approximately one-third of the national market value annually. Dr. Isaacs illustrated how the harvest and value of blue crabs in Louisiana have trended over the past decade. These trends were related to blue crab numbers from industries along the United States’ eastern coast and throughout the Gulf of Mexico. Dr. Isaacs further illustrated how these trends related to the amount and value of crab products imported into the U.S. After the presentation, Keith Watts brought up that although market value for crabs has stayed similar over the past few years, crabber’s expenses including fuel and bait have gone up, which has driven profit down. Dennis Landry mentioned that labor costs, which are mandated by the Federal Government, have also grown tremendously and drives down processor profit.

**Derelict Crab Trap Removal Events**

Marty Bourgeois announced that a *Notice of Intent* for the upcoming derelict crab trap collections has been ratified by the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission. The first closure, in portions of St. Bernard and Plaquemines Parish, is scheduled for February 25, 2012 through March 5, 2012. The second closure, in a portion of Terrebonne Parish, is scheduled for March 17-26, 2012. Dr. Julie Anderson, with LSU Sea Grant, has been working on sponsorships and partnerships for the events. Marty stated host sites had been secured at Sweetwater Marina in Delacroix, Breton Sound Marina in Hopedale, and LUMCON in Cocodrie. Julie stated there is a desire to find a way to recycle derelict traps that are collected, possibly using them for habitat enhancement or marsh building. Research on this is currently being conducted by Steve Hall at LSU. Pete Peterson asked about incentives for commercial fishermen who participate. Julie stated there is still a possibility of fuel vouchers for any commercial fishermen involved. Marty Bourgeois added that a mail-out has been produced to send to commercial crabbers as notification of the crab closures. Also, information will be gathered on Diamond-backed terrapin encounters during the crab trap cleanups.

**MSC Certification**

Marty Bourgeois announced that sustainability certification for the Louisiana blue crab industry is announced for public comment on the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) website. Some questions have been raised regarding incidental capture of diamondback terrapins in crab traps. Marty brought an example of a terrapin exclusion device used in other States to limit the capture of diamondback terrapins. Dennis Landry wondered how current depleted crab harvest trends might affect the certification process. Mark Schexnayder stated that certification was based on broader, longer term data. Dennis further stated that there are no crabs in areas that were affected by Deep Water Horizon. Keith Watts stated that using the terrapin exclusion devices on crab traps would be another expense to fishermen who are already suffering economically. Mark reminded Task Force members that Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries was continuing to pursue MSC certification on behalf of the Louisiana Crab Task Force. Some discussion followed on need for increased market for domestic crab meat and limitation of imported products.

**LA Wild Caught Seafood Certification Program**

Rene LeBreton, with the LDWF Office of Fisheries, gave an overview of the Louisiana Wild-Caught Seafood Certification Program. The program will be voluntary for commercial fishermen, seafood processors and vendors. It will be a means by which LDWF will certify seafood products that are caught and landed in the State of Louisiana. It is a similar program to that used by Idaho potatoes, Vidalia onions and Maine lobsters. To apply, participants will need to attend a one hour training, fill out an application, provide proof of possessing a commercial fishing license, and have no wildlife violations. Dennis Landry asked about issues with co-mingling certified and non-certified crab meat. Rene stated that it would be important to have as much participation as possible in order to not have such problems. Also, a premium certification will be made available in the future which would require additional training and more stringent guidelines on how product is handled. Pete Gerica reiterated the need to require drug testing for participants in the program. Dennis asked that LDWF make the program as simple as possible. Mark Schexnayder stated that plans were being made to walk participants through the process.

**LA Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board**

Ashley Roth, from LA Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board (LSPMB), gave an overview of current efforts by LSPMB to market Louisiana seafood products. A plan of action has been developed which would include defining a brand for Louisiana seafood products then selling and supporting the brand. Examples of work LSPMB has done were given, including several printed magazine ads and online ventures. Dennis Landry asked how markets in the city of New Orleans could be opened to local fishermen. Ashley stated that she would voice Dennis’s and other Crab Task Force members’ concerns to the LSPMB.

**H-2B Labor Legislation**

Pete Gerica moved, Keith Watts seconded, to table this agenda item until the next meeting due to Chairman Bauer not being in attendance. All in favor, motion carried.

**Other Business**

Pete Peterson asked Rodney Parfait about fishing success using crab pellets provided by Dennis Landry. Rodney said they didn’t do well due to losing consistency when submerged. Allen Matherne with LSU Ag Center mentioned that Julie Anderson and others at LSU were working on adding other types of by-catch to the crab pellets. Julie mentioned that funding had been secured to study alternative forms of crab bait. First step in the study will be to interview fishermen to find just what type of bait they wanted or preferred to use. These interviews would be being conducted soon.

Dennis asked if it is legal for shrimp trawlers to retain by-catch to be used for crab bait. Also, could trawlers retain crabs caught in federal waters for sale? Mark Schexnayder stated that this was legal.

After a short discussion on the topic of how soft shell crab production is reported to LDWF, Keith Watts moved, and Pete Gerica seconded, that “the Crab Task Force ask LDWF to research how soft shell crab production could be added back to the trip ticket reporting program and discuss their findings at the next meeting.” Motion carried, all in favor.

**Next Meeting / Agenda Items**

The task force requested that the next meeting be held in mid-February 2012.

Suggested agenda items included:

Trade Adjustment Assistance benefits for Crab fishermen

Soft shell crab reporting

H-2B Labor legislation

**Adjournment**

Pete Gerica moved and Pat Templet seconded that the “meeting be adjourned” - motion carried (all in favor). The Crab Task Force meeting was adjourned by Vice-Chairman Pete Peterson at 15:12.