

**Dave Donaldson
Assistant Director
Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission**

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Established by both state and federal statutes in July 1949, the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (Gulf Commission) is an organization of the five states (Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida) whose coastal waters are the Gulf of Mexico. It has as its principal objective the conservation, development, and full utilization of the fishery resources of the Gulf of Mexico to provide food, employment, income, and recreation to the people of the United States.

One of the most important functions of the Gulf Commission is to serve as a forum for the discussion of various challenges and programs of marine resources management, industry, research, etc. and to develop a coordinated approach among state and federal partners to address those issues for the betterment of the resource for all who are concerned.

INTERJURISDICTIONAL FISHERIES MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

As you are already aware, the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act (IJFA) of 1986, as amended (Title III, P.L. 99-659), was established by Congress to: (1) promote and encourage state activities in support of the management of interjurisdictional fishery resources and (2) promote and encourage management of interjurisdictional fishery resources throughout their range. In essence, the IJFA is to the states what the Magnuson Act is to the nation and the benefits of sound fisheries management under these acts do not accrue separately. The IJFA is probably the single most important

Congressional act to professionalize the states' scientific staff within the marine resource agencies.

In addition to supporting resource management, the IJFA also allows Congress to provide assistance to the states in the event of a Fisheries Disaster under SEC. 113 in the form of funds and other economic assistance and does not require state match for financial relief. Following hurricanes Katrina and Rita, Congress passed an emergency disaster relief funding package that included \$128 million for fisheries restoration. The package included funding to support restoration of oyster grounds, restoration of shrimp and other fisheries grounds, and cooperative research to restore fisheries. A second program was funded in 2007 in the amount of \$85 million to provide assistance for individual commercial fishermen and fishery-related business and industry that continue to recover from the post disaster impacts.

In the Gulf of Mexico, nearshore species such as Spanish mackerel, striped mullet, blue crab, and oyster comprise the majority of the commercial and recreational harvest, resulting in significant social and economic benefits to the states and the nation. In the last decade, nearly 80% of the Gulf's commercial landings and 90% of the recreational landings have come from state waters. In 2009, prior to the Deep Water Horizon disaster, 82% of the Gulf's total commercial fishery value was derived from state waters. The IJFA provides funding under Section 308(c) for the three interstate marine fisheries commissions to develop and revise interjurisdictional fishery management plans (FMPs) that are used by the states to enact appropriate management strategies with conservation standards intended to maintain sustainable stocks into the future. IJFA funding supports the states' monitoring and assessment programs and other research efforts that gauge the health of various commercially and recreationally important fish stocks.

In the Gulf of Mexico, the IJFA is the cornerstone of the fishery management programs for the states and has provided the support for long-term databases for commercial and non-commercial crustaceans and finfish in the Gulf of Mexico. The fishery-independent databases are becoming more and more essential in state and federal stock assessments and will be critical to future regional management success. The five Gulf States' long-term monitoring programs are funded to a large extent by the IJFA and provide the States the ability to gauge the health of commercially and recreationally important fish stocks in their waters. NOAA has established a federal fisheries stock assessment process designated the SouthEast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) to develop reliable fishery stock assessments for the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic regions. These assessments rely heavily upon the independent data provided by the states related to abundance indices of many species. As new stock assessment methodologies, such as ecosystem and food web approaches to management are explored and implemented, these state-derived data will be even more important. However, the ability to conduct stock assessments will hinge upon the quality and duration of these datasets which have been supported by the IJFA.

Under the IJFA language, the appropriations provided to the states to support their respective fisheries monitoring programs are determined by a formula based on a

state's total marine fisheries landings. Based on the 2011 appropriations, the maximum allocation that any state could receive was approximately \$100,000 and the minimum was approximately \$8,000. The Gulf of Mexico had three 'maximum' states by volume and value.

The loss of IJFA funds in the Gulf region has resulted in drastically reduced support for the monitoring of our shrimp, crab, and finfish fisheries. The loss of IJFA has resulted in the elimination of other funding sources under the 1-for-1 match requirement, including contributions from limited state license revenues. Florida has lost three positions from their blue crab, shrimp, and horseshoe crab program which represents 40% of their crustacean research staff. Texas has reprioritized other funding to determine the status of their shellfish populations for formulating shellfish management and harvest regulations in coastal waters. Louisiana will be reprioritizing their sampling programs which may slow the development of appropriate management recommendations. Mississippi has been forced to reduce efforts in other state fishery programs to make up the difference to continue collecting long-term fishery-independent data. Alabama reports that the loss of IJFA funding has resulted in less efficient enforcement related to Alabama and Gulf of Mexico fisheries and the interactions of fishing activities among protected species.

In addition to the five States' fisheries monitoring, the IJFA also provides funding for the Gulf Commission to regionally coordinate inshore, state water fishery resources by the development of regional fishery management plans (FMP). The FMPs are used by the states to enact appropriate management strategies with conservation standards intended to maintain sustainable stocks into the future and provide coordinated support to get these management measures passed through their respective state commissions and/or legislative bodies. The Gulf Commission uses its limited IJFA funds to support the completion of regional stock assessments that are currently excluded from the federal SEDAR program but required in regional FMPs. Finally, the funds from the IJFA also provide coordination for marine law enforcement in the five Gulf States which is critical to the enforceability of the regulations enacted by the states in accordance with the regional FMPs. However, the costs related to the Gulf Commission's IJFA activities have increased substantially in recent years, while the program has remained level-funded since 1998. The Gulf Commission currently has 16 species under management plans or profiles with 10 additional species identified for future plan development. Unlike federal fisheries management council plan development, the states provide agency staff to participate on the plan's technical task force and draft the regional inshore plans. Meeting and travel costs have more than doubled over the last decade forcing IJFA staff to streamline its program using electronic formats and internet access to supplement its activities. In future reauthorizations of the IJFA, considerations should be taken to fund the IFJA at levels appropriate to the cost of fisheries management for today and beyond.

SOUTHEAST AREA MONITORING AND ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (SEAMAP)

The SEAMAP program is a State/Federal/University program for collection, management, and dissemination of fishery-independent data and information in the southeastern United States. SEAMAP is a cooperative program whereby Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Marine Fisheries Service jointly plan and conduct surveys of economically significant fish and shellfish and the critical habitats that support them. The main goal of SEAMAP is to collect long-term, standardized, fishery-independent data on the condition of regional living marine resources and their environment.

The program consists of three operational components; SEAMAP-Gulf of Mexico, which began in 1981; SEAMAP-South Atlantic, implemented in 1983; and SEAMAP-Caribbean, formed in 1988. Each SEAMAP component operates independently under annual joint coordination, planning and conducting surveys and information dissemination.

SEAMAP has sponsored long-term (1982 to present) and standardized research vessel surveys that have become the very backbone of fisheries and habitat management in the region. The long-term dataset obtained through SEAMAP surveys provides the ONLY region-wide mechanism for monitoring the status of populations and habitats. Through its cooperative nature, SEAMAP has the ability to sample the entire coastline from North Carolina through Texas during the same time period and describe the distribution and abundance of fish populations throughout their range in order to better evaluate the status of recreational and commercially utilized fish stocks.

Current SEAMAP surveys include coastal shrimp and finfish trawl surveys (Gulf and South Atlantic), reef fish trap, hook and line, and video surveys (Caribbean and Gulf), inshore bottom longline (Gulf), bottom mapping/essential fish habitat data compilation (South Atlantic), spiny lobster, queen conch, and whelk surveys (Caribbean), annual plankton surveys (Gulf), and a striped bass winter tagging project (South Atlantic).

SEAMAP data has been used to assess long-term trends in coastal marine species, linking population trends with changes in environmental conditions such as global warming, nutrient enrichment, and overfishing. The data is used to document and define Essential Fish Habitat in the fishery management plans for the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic, and Caribbean Fishery Management Councils. SEAMAP provides long-term monitoring of juvenile red snapper abundances for the red snapper stock assessments.

SEAMAP data has been used to identify and verify the recovery of Gulf and South Atlantic king mackerel stocks, leading to increased fishing quotas, prove the need to eliminate Japanese longline fishing for Atlantic bluefin tuna in the Gulf of Mexico, and determine population size structures, abundances, and necessary information for stock assessments of Atlantic croaker, queen conch, spiny lobster, Spanish mackerel, whelk and weakfish.

SEAMAP data has been used to evaluate the abundance and size distribution of penaeid shrimp in federal and state waters to assist in determining opening and closing dates for commercial fisheries, assess the impact of the Deepwater Horizon disaster on marine species in the Gulf of Mexico through the Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) program, and conduct surveillance of hypoxia (Dead Zone) in the Gulf of Mexico that continues to threaten the marine resources of Louisiana and adjacent states. Finally, data collected through SEAMAP programs have been used by federal and state fishery managers, Universities, research agencies, and others, to expand the knowledge on species life histories, define essential fish habitat, develop fishery management plans, and determine the impact of fishery regulations.

In order to continue these important fishery-independent sampling efforts, expand current surveys, and begin new surveys to provide fishery-independent data on red snapper, shrimp, grouper, king mackerel, blue crabs, sharks, striped bass, weakfish, spiny lobster, queen conch, and other species that support the economies of the Southeast region, adequate resources need to be allocated towards these efforts. Without continued funding to support SEAMAP, the Southeast region will lose its only region-wide mechanism for monitoring the status of marine populations and habitats.

FISHERIES INFORMATION NETWORK (GulfFIN)

The GulfFIN program is a State/Federal cooperative program to collect, manage, and disseminate statistical data and information on the marine commercial and recreational fisheries of the Southeast region. It consists of two components: the Commercial Fisheries Information Network (ComFIN) and the Recreational Fisheries Information Network (RecFIN).

The need for a comprehensive and cooperative data collection program has never been greater because of the magnitude of the commercial and recreational fisheries and the differing roles and responsibilities of the agencies involved. GulfFIN, through the Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida marine agencies, the Gulf Commission, and NOAA Fisheries, has coordinated activities such as collection, management, and dissemination of marine recreational fisheries data; collection of catch and effort for head boats; collection of menhaden catch/effort data; operation of the GulfFIN Data Management System; implementation and operations of state commercial trip ticket programs; and sampling and analysis of biological data for commercial and recreational catches. These data collection activities have led to significant improvements of commercial and recreational data that has allowed managers to address some of the necessary management needs.

However, adequate fiscal resources need to be allocated for the current activities as well as expansion of current efforts and implementation of new data collection endeavors, ensuring that the best data is available for critical management decisions. Better data allows managers to make more informed decisions leading to better management of these essential natural resources.

GULF SEAFOOD TRACE PROGRAM

In the wake of the Deepwater Horizon disaster, the Gulf Commission, with funding and assistance from NOAA Fisheries, developed Gulf Seafood Trace, a regional electronic traceability program. Launched in March 2012, the Gulf Seafood Trace is a groundbreaking tool for promoting seafood from the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. The electronic, internet-based program aims to drive demand for Gulf seafood products from both seafood buyers and consumers by communicating its Gulf source (thus differentiating from imports), telling its unique story, and sharing key information from vessel to plate or shelf.

The program is comprised of three parts: an Electronic Traceability Platform, a Data Quality and Confirmation Component, and a Marketing Module. The use of an Electronic Traceability Platform builds off of the current electronic trip ticket seafood landing system and empowers the seafood market with the ability to access reliable trace data that has been approved and shared by each business in the supply chain. The implementation and utilization of a Data Quality and Confirmation Component helps to ensure the quality and reliability of the shared data. The Marketing Module allows seafood businesses to tell the compelling and unique story about their Gulf seafood to consumers. The components of the program are powered by Trace Register™, an electronic seafood traceability company.

Participation in the Gulf Seafood Trace program is voluntary, and is currently offered at no cost to qualified, Gulf seafood businesses through the end of 2014. To date, 56 businesses have enrolled in the regional program, representing approximately 25% of the Gulf seafood processors.