

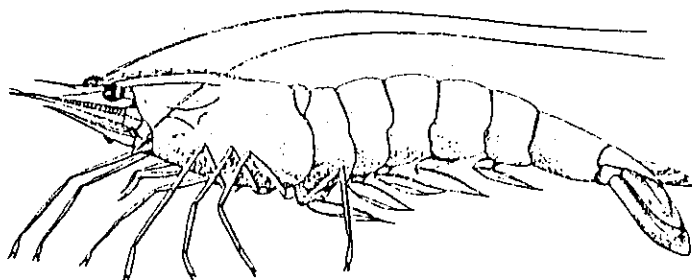


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SEA GRANT PROGRAM



LAGNIAPPE

COMMERCIAL FISHING DISASTER RELIEF NOW AVAILABLE

The National Marine Fisheries Service is now accepting disaster relief applications from commercial fishermen for the effect of hurricanes and floods that occurred between August 23, 1992 and December 31, 1995. This includes Hurricane Andrew.

There are several changes in the final program from what was originally proposed. Damage to vessels as well as fishing gear will be eligible. Also, they will pay 100 percent of the equipment's value rather than 75 percent of the depreciated value as originally proposed. Fishermen are limited to \$7,500 per claim, with a total limit on all claims from a fisherman being \$22,500.

Fishermen must provide a copy of the vessel registration and their licenses, sworn statements from all crew members and a copy of their income tax return showing at least 50 percent commercial fishing income with each application. They must also provide a receipt of original purchase for the gear, replacement or repair receipts and proof that the vessel fished for three trips before the loss. Finally, they must include a statement as to why they think the loss or damage to their vessel or gear was due to hurricanes, floods and their aftereffects.

Applications will be accepted until October 2, 1996. Applications can be obtained by writing Charles Cooper, Financial Services Division, NMFS, 1315 East-West Hwy, Silver Spring, MD 20910.

1995 WAS GOOD YEAR FOR SPORTS FISHERMAN

The results are in, and according to Harry Blanchet, Department of Wildlife and Fisheries Marine Fisheries Finfish Program Manager, 1995 was a good year for saltwater sportfishermen. Speckled trout fishermen caught about 6.9 million fish, which is above the 6.0 caught in 1994 and well above the five-year average of 5.1 million fish. Redfish harvest was also up, with a 1995 harvest of 2.4 million fish as compared to 1.4 million fish in 1994 and the 1.3 million fish average. This large harvest was predicted well in advance by Department of Wildlife and Fisheries biologists based on the very strong 1993 year class (fish hatched in that year that survived).

The recreational harvest of black drum and sheepshead was also up. Black drum harvest was 231,000 fish in 1995 compared to 142,000 fish in 1994 and the average of 171,000. Sheepshead jumped from 291,000 in 1994 to 647,000 in 1995, well over the average of 350,000. Red snapper increased slightly from 240,000 to 274,000. Both years were slightly over the average of 198,000 fish. Southern flounder harvest dropped from 312,000 in 1994 to 256,000 in 1995, below the average of 339,000 fish.

Many factors go into good harvest besides the number of fish in the water. Weather influences fishing pressure as do changes in fishing regulations. The state of the economy is also important. The more discretionary money that sportfishermen have, the more boats they can buy and the more trips they can afford.

ARE BLUE CRABS OVERFISHED?

Blue crabs are heavily utilized by both commercial and recreational fishermen. Recreational crab trap license sales have increased from 224 in 1988-89 to 3131 in 1994-95. One survey showed that 42.7% of the recreational boaters in extreme southeast Louisiana did some recreational crabbing. A more recent survey in Terrebonne Parish showed that one-third of the saltwater sportfishing license holders participated in crabbing. It is estimated that the yearly recreational harvest of blue crabs was 1,848,000 pounds in the 1990's.

The commercial blue crab fishery has existed since at least the late 1800's. Hard crab landings from 1950 to 1983 ranged up and down from a low of 5,692,000 lbs. (1964) to a high of 23,080,000 lbs. (1973). From 1984, landings grew rapidly, setting five records in five years. Four years, 1987, 1988, 1991 and 1992 showed over 50,000,000 lbs. of production. Preliminary figures for 1995 are 34,300,000 lbs.

Preliminary commercial softshell landings for 1995 are 280,000 pounds. Interestingly, while many people blame the harvest of shedder crabs (used to produce softshell crabs) for the decline in crab landings, recent production of softshell crabs is far, far below what was produced in earlier years. In 1934, softshell crab production was 651,000 pounds and landings increased to nearly 2,400,000 pounds in 1945. Harvest of softshell crabs remained higher than current levels all the way to 1963.

In 1950, commercial hard crab production was over 97% by trotlines and about 2% by drop net. By 1964, 24% of the production was with drop nets. Commercial drop net production declined to zero by 1973. Trotlines remained the primary means of production until 1965. By 1967, crab traps produced the majority of blue crabs and for the last five years have produced 99.9% of the commercial hard crab harvest.

Blue crab populations are monitored by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries. One of the methods they use is trawl samples. These are taken weekly in the eight months of March to October and bi-weekly from November to February. They are taken at 25 stations across the coast and have been conducted for 29 years.

The results of this long-term research are very interesting. Since 1967, the catch of legal size (5 inches commercially, there is no recreational minimum size) blue crabs in the research trawls has shown ups and downs from year to year, but an overall steady decrease in numbers, with the last four years being especially low. Commercial fishing monitoring has also shown a steady decrease in catch per trap, to about 30% of what it was in 1978. The number of crab traps has increased from about 118,000 in 1978 to over 653,000 in 1994.

This data may tend to lead one to believe that crabs are overfished to the point of not being able to replace themselves and keep the population stable (recruitment overfishing). However, this data alone does not tell the whole story. The very same trawl samples that show steadily declining numbers of legal size crabs, show a steady increase in the number of blue crabs under the legal size limit since 1967. In fact, twice as many small blue crabs are being sampled today as in 1967. Additionally, the numbers of blue crab larvae (tiny baby blue crabs) in Louisiana coastal waters are 10 to 100 times higher than in Atlantic Coastal waters.

What does this mean? Well, first it means that blue crabs in Louisiana are not being recruitment overfished, since enough crabs are surviving to spawn the next healthy crop. It does mean that blue crabs are probably being caught as fast as they reach the legal size and few live long enough to grow larger.

This means that blue crabs may be "growth overfished," a term that describes a situation when fishing pressure is too heavy to allow the fishery to produce its maximum poundage. The fact that the total number of traps used is increasing and that the total statewide catch is not increasing comparably may mean that the fishery is "overcapitalized." This simply means that the fishery may have more harvesting capacity than is needed to catch the available crabs in an economically efficient manner.

Finally, it must be remembered that blue crabs are a cyclic resource, with naturally occurring ups and downs in catches. This has been noted by researchers in Florida, Maryland and Virginia.

Sources: History, Management, and Status and Trends in the Louisiana Blue Crab Fishery by Vincent Guillory and William S. Perret, Proceedings of the Blue

Crab Symposium (In press), 1996., Defining Fisheries: A Users Glossary by Kenneth J. Roberts and others, Louisiana Sea Grant College Program, 1995. and personal communication with Vincent Guillory.

SOFT T.E.D.S AS B.R.D.S

With the expected upcoming regulations requiring bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) to reduce finfish bycatch in the gulf, BRD testing has become very important. Recently Texas A & M University research found that the most effective BRD in reducing red snapper bycatch is actually the Andrews soft TED which shows a reduction of young red snapper bycatch of 77%.

The only other BRD tested that is showing a large reduction of young red snappers is the 5 x 12 inch fisheye in the 30 mesh position. It shows a 66% reduction in red snapper one year old, but no reduction in younger snapper.

The fisheye would have to be used in addition to a TED. With the Andrews soft TED, the TED would serve as both a TED and a BRD. The problem is that the National Marine Fisheries Service will likely outlaw the use of soft TEDs this year. Approximately 20% of Gulf of Mexico shrimpers use the Andrews soft TED.

H.A.C.C.P. UPDATE

On January 1, 1998, Seafood processors throughout the United States will begin working under the new HACCP Seafood inspection system. Under the HACCP system, seafood processors will have to develop a HACCP plan for their plant and attend a 2 ½ day HACCP class.

The Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service Sea Grant Program is in the process of planning a series of about a dozen of these HACCP classes across the state. We hope to begin them this fall and will have classes that focus on finfish, shrimp, crabs, oysters and crawfish. During this class, each participant will be taught how to develop a HACCP plan for his plant.

It will be mandatory under federal law for a seafood processing plant to meet HACCP regulations. It is unclear at this time about requirements for seafood buying docks and seafood importers. We will announce the class schedule and who is required to attend in the next couple of months.

In the meantime, there will be two seminars available by satellite broadcast. The first is at 2:00 p.m. on July 17 and is "**How you can better meet the FDA mandatory HACCP quality assurance program**". The second is at 2 p.m. on September 11 and is "**A legal assessment of the FDA's new HACCP regulations.**" Both may be viewed at the auditorium in Knapp Hall on the LSU Campus.

SPORTFISHING STUDY

A recent study by the Sportfishing Promotion Council surveyed sportsfishermen throughout the U. S. According to the study, 55% of the anglers fish primarily in lakes or reservoirs, 21% in river or streams, 11% in ponds, 10% in saltwater offshore and 4% in saltwater from the shore. The most popular fish was bass followed by freshwater trout and then catfish.

Half the fishermen surveyed released the catch from their last trip and half ate it and 53% reported catching between one and five fish on the trip.

Thirty-eight percent of the freshwater anglers said they purchased their equipment at discount stores, 22% at sporting goods stores, 20% at specialty or bait shops and 4% said they shopped by catalog. These anglers spent an average of \$163.27 on fishing equipment and supplies in 1994. Of those owning boats, 29% are younger than 34; 44% are 35 to 54 years old and 27% are 55 or older.

When asked what keeps them from fishing, 70% of the anglers said "no time" but also said they were bothered by too few fish as a result of fishing pressure, increased regulations, water pollution and by rude behavior by other anglers and boaters.

Source: ASA Update Vol. 2, Issue 1. Spring 1996

NEW FISH IDENTIFICATION BOOK AVAILABLE

Two years ago the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service Sea Grant Marine Advisory Program and the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries formed a Technical/Popular Writing Team. The purpose of this group was to prepare publications written in everyday language based on technical fisheries research.

One of the priorities established by the group was the development of a book of fish photographs to help fishermen identify hard-to-identify fish such as groupers, snappers, jacks, and fish that resemble them.

The book has finally been developed and is ready for distribution. It has 95 color photographs, tips on identification and is printed on waterproof paper. It does not illustrate every fish in the gulf but rather focuses on hard-to-identify species that anglers are likely to catch.

The photographers were Department of Wildlife and Fisheries biologists and the book was published by the Louisiana Sea Grant Program. Copies of "**A Fisherman's Guide to Common Coastal Fishes of Louisiana & Adjacent Offshore Waters**" cost 20 dollars each and can be ordered from the Louisiana Sea Grant Communications Office, LSU, 105 Wetland Resources Bldg., Baton Rouge, LA 70803-7507.

FISH LANDINGS

During the legislative debate on House Bill 815 (which became the Act 1316--the gill net law), there was disagreement on how well the commercial market for fish could be supplied if the bill was passed. Listed below are the landings of inshore commercial fish this year compared to last year. All 1996 figures are considered preliminary until the final annual landings report is issued.

| MONTH | BLACK DRUM | | FLOUNDER | | MULLET | |
|-------|------------|---------|----------|--------|-----------|---------|
| | 1995 | 1996 | 1995 | 1996 | 1995 | 1996 |
| 1 | 313,922 | 174,921 | 32,551 | 15,449 | 719,157 | 229,972 |
| 2 | 298,431 | 175,071 | 17,582 | 3,785 | 790,981 | - |
| 3 | 815,528 | 69,262 | 23,736 | 4,852 | 750,428 | - |
| 4 | 367,605 | 64,781 | 37,216 | 2,584 | 558,516 | - |
| 5 | 176,277 | - | 47,318 | - | 549,657 | - |
| 6 | 220,485 | - | 47,043 | - | 390,990 | - |
| 7 | 294,123 | - | 51,740 | - | 567,201 | - |
| 8 | 258,384 | - | 54,810 | - | 686,284 | - |
| 9 | 45,238 | - | 15,404 | - | 199,708 | - |
| 10 | 88,251 | - | 36,470 | - | 3,583,658 | - |
| 11 | 48,919 | - | 109,971 | - | 4,287,097 | - |
| 12 | 72,275 | - | 59,331 | - | 1,461,933 | - |

| MONTH | POMPANO | | SPOTTED SEATRUT | | SHEEPSHEAD | |
|-------|---------|------|-----------------|---------|------------|---------|
| | 1995 | 1996 | 1995 | 1996 | 1995 | 1996 |
| 1 | 2,998 | 806 | 241,711 | 181,672 | 509,236 | 242,935 |
| 2 | 158 | 15 | 195,398 | 130,594 | 504,335 | 244,504 |
| 3 | 431 | 62 | 60,013 | 2,192 | 681,200 | 441,759 |
| 4 | 601 | 30 | - | - | 596,722 | 692,635 |
| 5 | 1,961 | - | - | - | 219,521 | - |
| 6 | 10,935 | - | - | - | 149,039 | - |
| 7 | 19,077 | - | - | - | 112,276 | - |
| 8 | 15,297 | - | - | - | 100,512 | - |
| 9 | 14,542 | - | - | - | 14,013 | - |
| 10 | 1,814 | - | - | - | 73,805 | - |
| 11 | 6,871 | - | 16,828 | - | 166,654 | - |
| 12 | 8,304 | - | 142,851 | - | 139,169 | - |

There are no mullet landings after January because the season closed January 15. The flounder regulations restricting fishermen to 10 fish per person did not go into effect until May, so that didn't impact the first four months. Speckled trout season with nets closed on March 1, so landings in March are from the commercial rod and reel fishery.

Gill net season for other fishes such as black drum and sheepshead also closed March 1. According to the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries landings statistician, March and April sheepshead landings are either rod-and-reel or more likely trawl landings from outside waters. As of June 14, a total of 18 resident saltwater commercial rod-and-reel licenses have been sold.

FRESHWATER DIVERSION AND FISHERIES

Freshwater diversion projects are a major part of the coastal restoration plan for south Louisiana. These projects are designed to restore the traditional salinities found in coastal Louisiana. The Caernarvon Diversion Project is already on line in Plaquemines Parish and projects are planned for Bonnet Carre (St. Charles Parish) Davis Pond (St. Charles/Jefferson Parishes) and Bayou Lafourche (Ascension Parish).

One concern about these projects is what impact this freshwater will have on marine fisheries species. Recently Dr. James P. Geaghan completed a before-and-after study of how the freshwater diversion project at Caernarvon has affected the distribution and numbers of eleven species, brown shrimp, white shrimp, blue crab, croaker, spot, menhaden, white trout, black drum, redfish, sheepshead and speckled trout.

The results of the study do not show a strong connection between freshwater diversion and changes in these fishes' distribution and numbers. The species showing the most impact were spot, blue crab and shrimp. Populations of spot shifted away from the freshwater diversion structure. Blue crabs shifted slightly toward the structure. White shrimp were slightly more abundant at areas closest and farthest from the structure and decreased in between. Brown shrimp decreased in most areas, especially those where white shrimp decreased and blue crabs increased.

Source: Caernarvon Project Fish Analysis, May 1995. by James P. Geaghan.

COAST GUARD CONCERNED ABOUT VESSEL NAVIGATION PROBLEMS

Chief Warrant Officer Tom Bunch of the U. S. Coast Guard Eight District has issued a memo concerning navigational conflicts involving fishing boats. The Coast Guard has received many complaints from transport and fishing vessels about other fishing vessels violating the Rules of the Road.

In channels such as Southwest Pass and the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet, fishing boats often cut across the channel in front of large ships. This is illegal and dangerous. Large ships have poor ability to maneuver and can easily get blown aground when slowing or stopping for these boats.

Another problem is shrimp boat operators leaving the helm unattended and the vessel under power while they work on the deck. Even if the helm is tied and the vessel is circling, this is a dangerous practice. Improper vessel lighting at night is another serious problem. Fishermen should refer to the Navigation Rules Book which is available

for purchase at any navigational or map store. A common complaint to the Coast Guard concerns a faster vessel overtaking a slower one. The rule is simple, "any vessel overtaking any other shall keep out of the way of the vessel being overtaken."

Finally, while in open water, a vessel with fishing gear in the water has the right-of-way over a navigating vessel, this does not hold true in established channels and their entrances. In these areas fishing vessels do not have right-of-way over other vessels and cannot obstruct navigating vessels.

New Orleans Coast Guard Captain of the Port, Captain Gordon Marsh and Group Commander Captain Thomas Landvogt are concerned about these dangerous situations and may likely increase enforcement actions.

OYSTER AND COASTAL RESTORATION COMMITTEE

Louisiana has a long history in the cultivation of oysters. Many oyster beds were developed from barren mud bottoms and have been cultivated by the same family for several generations under 15-year leases from the state.

The needs of this industry have recently come into conflict in some areas with the public priority to restore Louisiana's coastal areas and halt erosion. Some leases are located in areas of fresh water diversion outfalls (which may kill oysters) and others are in areas where state plans to use dredge material to build marsh.

Recently the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources has established the Oyster Coastal Restoration Mitigation Committee. This committee has been charged with finding solutions when the private property rights of the oyster farmers conflicts with the priority of coastal restoration. Mitigation may involve financial compensation or movement of leases. The current chairman of the committee is Len Bahr who is the Executive Assistant for Office of Coastal Activities.

MARINE ADVISORY BOARD NEWS

At it's May meeting, the Jefferson Parish Marine Fisheries Advisory Board was approached by Barataria shrimper Rickey Matherne concerning improving television reporting of offshore weather conditions for recreational and commercial fishermen. He suggested the possibility of the LOOP Inc. offshore terminal supplying real-time weather conditions to a New Orleans TV station for their broadcast.

The Marine Advisory Board has acted on his suggestion and facilitated an agreement between LOOP Inc. and weatherman Bob Breck of WVUE TV. Twice a day, in time for the evening and late-night news LOOP Inc. will be supplying information on wind speed and direction, height of seas, temperature, and fog conditions to Breck. The LOOP Inc. terminal is located 18 miles offshore in Grand Isle Block 59.

PRO-FISHING CAMPAIGN LAUNCHED

Seafood and fishing industry leaders have launched a national campaign to promote the value of commercial fishing, to counter net bans and what they feel are attacks on the commercial fishing industry.

More than 65 seafood industry representatives met at a "Fisheries Forum" sponsored by the National Fisheries Institute at Arlington, Virginia. The participants agreed to start a communications and educational campaign under the "Seafood for America" banner. The program will include national efforts and will provide help to regional and local organizations involved in fisheries conflicts.

Source: Seafood Business. Vol. 15, No. 3 May/June 1996.

THE GUMBO POT

This month's recipe comes from Luis Campos. Luis is the stationary engineer in the building that my office is located in and is a native of Guatemala. This Central American dish is not spicy, but is delicious. It is also timely, since this is the peak of the creole tomato season in Louisiana.

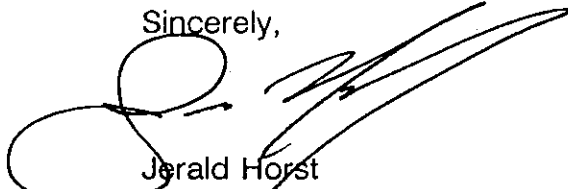
Pescado en Salsa de Tomates

2 lbs fish fillets
10 medium tomatoes
3 medium onions

½ head of garlic
1 cup of cooking oil
salt and pepper

Chop tomatoes as small as possible. Mince onions and garlic. In a small amount of oil, cook tomatoes, onions and garlic over medium-high heat. Add salt and pepper to taste. While this is cooking, fry the unseasoned fish fillets in another pan to light golden color. Do not overcook! Spread fillets in a baking dish and cover with tomato mixture. Put in oven and cook about 10 minutes, until sauce taste blends with fish. Serve plain or over rice. Serves 4 to 6.

Sincerely,



Jerald Horst
Area Agent (Fisheries)
Jefferson, St. Charles, St. John