

August 18, 2009

## **UPDATE ON THE ORANGE BEACH, AL. GULF COUNCIL MEETING.**

**This news release is in cooperation with SOFA and GFA.**

**The Gulf fishermen's Association and Southern Offshore Fishermen's Association was faced with some very challenging and difficult decisions at this meeting.**

**The suite of options presented at the meeting by scientist and regulators to reopen the fishery without putting loggerheads in jeopardy all left a lot of vessels in jeopardy!**

**Our common goal at the council meeting was to negotiate with the NGO's and the agency and reopen the fishery with as many vessels as possible that could still participate in the long line fishery with the least amount of restrictions in order to still be practicable.**

**Some of the options that was discussed but rejected by GFA and SOFA were a 50-fathom closure for three months and a 40,000lb criteria for a long line endorsement that would have kept 61 vessels in the fishery with no other restrictions.**

**A 50,000lb criteria for a long line endorsement with a 35-fathom 3-month closure that would have only left 39 vessels.**

**A 45,000lb criteria for a long line endorsement with a 35 fathom 3 month closure that would have left 50 vessels in the fishery.**

**On the last day we were presented with new data on reducing the amount of hooks per set that would keep as many vessels in the fishery as possible with out putting turtles in jeopardy.**

**GFA and SOFA agreed on a 40,000lb LL criteria, three month 35 fathom closure and 1000 hooks per set. According to the data presented to us that would have given us a 52% reduction in turtle interactions.**

**Though our council members fought hard to give us this option the agency argued that it may put the new biological opinion on loggerheads in jeopardy and suggested that we needed between 60 and 70% reduction to be safe, after much debate between council members about these numbers they voted on 750 fully made rigs and no more than 1000 hooks on a vessel. Along with this they voted on a 40,000lb LL endorsement (61) vessels, and a three month 35 fathom closure. (66% reduction)**

**GFA and SOFA applaud its supporting members and their families that took the time to come to this meeting and give testimony and sit in on the discussions.**

**We also applaud all other members for the dues they pay, without the dues that were paid we would not have had any input on the science or the new regulations and would have had to live with more stringent regulations with a lot less vessels, that would have left our infrastructure more vulnerable to collapse. (Fish houses, tackle suppliers, bait boats, restaurants, and ect.).**

**GFA and SOFA realize that there are still 60+ vessels that will be displaced in this fishery and have been working on a package in congress to release some conversion money for these vessels. We are looking for a substantial amount to cover buying back your old gear, paying for the new gear and support money to get these vessels through the learning curve of new gear.**

**Our goal is to not lose any fishermen through displacement or bankruptcy.**

**GFA and SOFA also applaud Rick Marks who has been working in DC for us on all of these issues, Rick has been instrumental in getting us the support we needed in the higher offices of NMFS, congress and our senators. He has also attended a few council meetings including this last one and gave outstanding testimony for our industry.**

**We would also like to applaud Trevor Kenchington for supplying the valuable data and participating in the SSC meeting for us, Trevor also attended a council meeting to discuss the science with the council members.**

**Though the council voted on amendment 31 and passed it we still have some hoops to jump through before we get our fishery reopened. Its to soon for the agency to give us a time frame for reopening but that should change in a few weeks after all this gets rolling through the regulatory process.**

**Also I should mention that we had a lot of support on our predicament with turtle interactions from the recreational sectors and the charter boat industry. They to as us do not like being penalized with inadequate data that looks more politically driven than scientific.**

**Our next challenge is GAG grouper, I'm sure you've heard the rumors. Well there not rumors, we will be facing substantial cuts in tac in the near future. This will affect all user groups, (comm., rec., and the for hire sector.).**

**It will involve the full process of reviewing the data, giving testimony at the public hearings and the council meetings.**

**In order for us to attend these meetings and represent your interest in this industry it can be very costly! This last round involving the turtles cost GFA, Sofa and a few participating fish houses over \$70,000.00 in legal fees.**

**GFA and Sofa set up an account with Fishermen's Ideal Supply House called the Grouper Defense Fund and have put matching funds in over the past months to pay these legal fees. We hope we can continue to count on your support, every little**

**contribution counts and all money is used in your best interest. We do not draw salaries from this money to represent you.**

**Thanks for your support.**

**Hope to see you at the next meeting!**

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