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Controversy over menhaden fishing impact continues

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By Steve Phillips - bio | email

BILOXI, MS (WLOX) - A group of conservationists and community leaders is calling for a comprehensive study of the Mississippi Sound. They are especially interested in the long term impact of commercial menhaden fishing.

That controversial issue attracted a large and diverse crowd at Tuesday morning's meeting of the Commission on Marine Resources.

Hancock Bank chairman George Schloegel was first to address the CMR on the issue.

"And I would urge this commission to listen to the voices of the community, who have said we need to do a study. We need to get past opinions and get to facts," he said.

Schloegel admitted folks may be wondering why a retired banker is concerned about fish studies.

"I'm not talking about fish. I'm talking about our lives. I'm talking about our future. And if we don't properly manage, with good scientific fact, the Mississippi Sound, then shame on us," said Schloegel.

The impact of menhaden or pogy fishing is at the heart of the issue. They are the small, oily fish caught commercially then processed into fish oil capsules, fertilizers and fish food.

Aaron Viles is with the Gulf Restoration Network.

"The menhaden fishery catches ten million pounds of bio mass as by-catch. We need to consider that and how it affects the health of that larger eco-system," Viles told the CMR.

Several speakers voiced concern about how pogy fishing impacts the vitality of the coast's tourism industry.

"Tourism and recreational fishing are the very backbone of our coastal economy. Yet these industries aren't considered in the current hands off management policy of the menhaden industry," said Louis Skrmetta, who represents Ship Island Excursions.

A representative from the menhaden industry says current management practices are helping ensure the long term health of the resource.

Rick Schillaci is a spokesman for Omega Protein, the company that fishes for and processes menhaden.

"Scientists know that because the menhaden industry harvests about 20 percent or less of the total fish from the population, there is an abundance of menhaden left to feed other species that are economically and recreationally important," said Schillaci.

All the comments came during the public forum portion of the CMR meeting. Since there was no agenda item, there was no action taken.

At last month's meeting, the Commission on Marine Resources refused to impose any new regulations on the menhaden fishing industry.

Tuesday morning, the Gulf Restoration Network presented petitions calling for public hearings on the issue.

Steve Phillips reports on impacts of commercial fishing



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Oh Lord, here we go again. Lets look back to mullet fishing. It was disrupting the "Tourism industry" so they shut it down. Which put 100's of fisherman out of business and ruined scores of families lives. Now they are going after Pogy fishing again. When will it stop. Shrimping restrictions, crabbing restrictions, Oyster restrictions, and so on and so on. They won't rest until every commercial fisherman is out of a job and all of our seafood is imported from China, deadly chemicals and all. The madness needs to end.

Anonymous

Wednesday, February 18, 2009

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George Schoegel said we need to get past opinions and get to the facts and manage the .Ms. sound with good scientific facts. All the scientific facts say the pogy stocks are healthy, bycatch is less than 1%,and no catch limit is necessary.

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Tuesday, February 17, 2009

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