



## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### INFORMATION SERVICE

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ADDRESS BY ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR, ROSS LEFFLER, AT THE MEETING OF THE SOUTHEASTERN FISHERIES ASSOCIATION, AT MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA, MAY 18, 1959

#### THE SOUTHEASTERN FISHERIES PROGRAM

I'm delighted to have this opportunity to meet with the commercial fisheries interests of the Southeast and discuss some of our activities in this area which is so important to the industry.

The role of the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries of the Fish and Wildlife Service is, of course, to help industry solve its fishery management problems. We deal in products of knowledge--knowledge necessary to predict when, where and how much to harvest in order to insure "maximum sustained yield" from the resource, and knowledge on how to most efficiently harvest and then move the product to the consumer with a minimum loss in poundage and a maximum standard of quality.

Obviously, this means a large part of our effort must go into our most important activity of research. At this point, I'd like to especially commend the State and Federal fishery workers of this part of the country for the good example they have established in developing a pattern of cooperative research effort to get answers which are desperately needed if we are to preserve the estuarine areas which are so essential to certain species of fish, shellfish and wildlife.

Here is a situation where commercial and recreational interests are bound together in a common problem. It is highly desirable that you become strong allies and work in close coordination. Many future benefits to both sides can accrue from this association.

#### Estuarine Research

This estuarine research to determine the effects of the many changes that have taken place in the estuarine environments for commercially important species of fish and shellfish is perhaps the most important single research need in the Gulf area at this time. This has long been recognized, but Federal funds have been completely inadequate for mounting a program which is commensurate with the magnitude of the problem. I repeat: we are glad to report, however, that both the States along the Gulf Coast and the Federal Government are teaming up to solve some aspects inherent in this problem. A coordinating committee has been established through the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission. This committee, composed of State and Federal representation, is currently active and is now guiding the documentation of the changes that have taken place in the Gulf estuaries as a first step in measuring the size of the research problem involved.

The broad research program which has been proposed encompasses ecological studies to determine the relationships of all forms of fish, shellfish and wildlife to their estuarine environment; an investigation of the responses of all these forms to variables in that environment; inshore oceanographic examinations to determine the nature of the physical and chemical characteristics of these important coastal areas; life history studies of the important commercial and sport species which require this environment and also the effect of estuarine changes on waterfowl and fur animals utilizing this habitat.

We still have a long way to go to get the job done, but we are realistically facing up to the problem of doing something about it.

#### Shrimp Investigations

We are also involved in very important shrimp research. Through the excellent work which is being conducted by the State of Florida, the University of Miami Marine Laboratory, and the Federal Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, we are learning much about the Tortugas shrimp fishery that will lead to its proper management. State biologists are carefully studying the movement of shrimp on the commercial fishing grounds, and have set up regulations to protect the small shrimp. The University of Miami Marine Laboratory, with contract funds from the Federal Government, has made studies of the depth-size relationship of the pink shrimp. Their scientists are now tackling, through extension of this contract, the problem of identifying the pink shrimp larvae and the mechanics of the movement of eggs and larvae from the ocean spawning grounds to the nursery grounds inshore. Federal research on marking shrimp by use of vital stains is paying off. Juvenile shrimp leaving the nursery grounds also are being marked and liberated in the shallow waters of the lower Everglades by Service biologists, and several have been recovered in the Tortugas commercial fishery. We now have positive proof that these estuaries are nursery grounds for the Tortugas.

Placing all these so-called pieces of research information together, we can liken the results to completion of a jigsaw puzzle. We are gradually fitting enough pieces into place so that the picture is beginning to take a recognizable form. This information, along with comprehensive statistical data collected on the fishery, will provide the foundation for the most effective management of any of the populations of shrimp in the entire Gulf of Mexico.

Similar studies are needed for the Campeche fishery, the western Gulf fisheries, and those in other sections of the Gulf. Some research is currently under way. However, at the request of the industry in the western Gulf area, the Bureau has drafted a program of accelerated shrimp research. Facts must be obtained more rapidly if the shrimp stocks supporting this most important fishery in the United States are to be utilized to the best advantage. We will proceed just as rapidly as funds become available.

Recent interest has been shown in the upper Florida Keys area with respect to oil production. Exploration for this product so vital to our every day needs is taking place in limited areas, and at least one well is being drilled in the

vicinity of Marquesas Key. In some cases, this development is taking place in offshore waters, and in other instances in waters clearly within the jurisdiction of the State of Florida. We must all remain alert to these developments which are in the close proximity of the rich Tortugas shrimp fishery.

There is another very important problem in the fish and wildlife field which is of great interest to this area. Many very toxic insecticides and pesticides are in common use today. Considerable concern has been expressed over the accumulative effects of these materials on a long-term basis as damaging to fish and wildlife resources inhabiting inshore bays and lagoons. The chemicals used are generally highly toxic to both the adult and the young of commercially desirable fish and shellfish. Some research is being conducted on this problem, and more is planned for this coming year. A well-rounded program is needed to determine the extent of the present hazards and to devise control methods of some kind. In this respect, bills have been introduced in the present session of Congress, which will authorize and direct continuing studies on a large scale of the effects of these toxicants upon fish and wildlife for the purpose of preventing losses of these natural resources.

#### Improved Markets

Now let's turn to the matter of better resource use. Some new avenues for utilization of Gulf fishery resources have opened with the fantastic growth of the industrial fishery along the Gulf Coast. This is the fishery for species used in the manufacture of fish meal, for canned pet food, or other similar purposes. The Bureau of Commercial Fisheries exploratory fishing vessels have been engaged in evaluating the potential of several species of herring-like fish which will meet these needs. We are also experimenting with types of fishing gear suitable for use on the ordinary shrimp vessel in taking these fish. The objective here, of course, is to provide some diversification of fishing by shrimp vessels, and their profitable utilization during off-seasons for shrimp. Considerable promise is being found in adaptation of various types of lampara nets.

The Bureau of Commercial Fisheries market promotional programs have been especially aimed at market improvement for several Gulf fishery products and particularly for mullet and Spanish mackerel in Florida. Coping with the long-time problem of heavy seasonal production and frequent surpluses of mullet and Spanish mackerel, both excellent fish, the Bureau marketing personnel have been working very closely with the industry in promoting these items. We think that we see some improvement as a result of special attention to these species in the very recent Lenten fisheries promotional campaign.

There also have been reports of rather sizable movements of Spanish mackerel fillets, as well as stocks of mullet, out of producers' hands into consumer channels. There is a tremendous potential in the development of greater consumer utilization of these fish and contingent upon this, a substantial potential for even greater production of these species from coastal waters.

All these things are positive efforts to get the answers you need to your problems. Our intention is simply to help the American consumer by assisting you to get the best possible product to the family table at the least possible expense. We're happy to have the opportunity to work side by side with you to achieve such an objective.

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