

**NWX-DOC CONFERENCING**

**Moderator: Allison Garrett**  
**April 04, 2013**  
**10:00 am CT**

Coordinator: Welcome and thank you for standing by.

At this time all participants are in a listen only mode. During the question and answer session, you may press star 1 on your touchtone phone if you would like to ask a question.

Today's conference is being recorded, if you have any objections you may disconnect at this time.

Now I'd like to turn the meeting over to Miss Allison Garrett.

Allison Garrett: Thank you so much, good morning everyone.

My name is Allison Garrett, and I am a communications specialist with NOAA Fisheries in our southeast regional office.

First off, I wanted to thank everybody for joining us today to talk about the 2013 recreational red snapper fishing season in the Gulf of Mexico.

Dr. Roy Crabtree is here and will answer your questions and listen to comments. We hope that for those of you who are able to attend the council meetings this will be very much like what you've been to before in the informal Q and A session after the council meetings. We chose this time of day to try to accommodate people while they were at work and hopefully folks can join us on a lunch break. I did want to take a minute to let you know how this'll work.

Everyone who calls in is placed in a queue, the operator will unmute your mic and you can ask a question, and then you'll move down in the queue so that we can try to get to everyone today. When submitting a question or comment we simply ask that you be respectful. We're going to continue this teleconference until one o'clock today, and now I'd like to go ahead and turn it over to our NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Administrator, Dr. Roy Crabtree.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Good morning everyone. So we've set up this call to talk about red snapper and mainly about what's going on in the recreational fishery right now. And I know people are concerned and unhappy because the recreational season has been getting shorter over the past few years, while at the same time I know that everyone's seeing more red snapper, quite likely more red snapper than you've ever seen in your lifetime.

And so the question we - continually here is why are the seasons getting shorter when there's so many red snapper out there. And in essence the problem we have right now is, yes the stock's rebuilding, there are more fish out there now and they're bigger, and we are in the process of raising the quotas every year.

But at the same time the recreational catch rates are going up as well, and the reason season is getting shorter is because the recreational catch rates are going up faster than the quotas are going up. So this year the estimate of the recreational season was 28 days, and that was assuming that we had compatible regulations and seasons with all of the states.

As it stands right now, we're not going to have compatible seasons with Texas, Louisiana, probably not Florida. So we put out an emergency rule that the Gulf Council requested that would reduce the length of the federal season off of the states, which have less restrictive state water seasons. And what we've tried to do is to reduce the federal season in a way to compensate for the increased catches that we expect will happen in state waters, and as it stands now we expect a season of 28 days off of Alabama and Mississippi.

Both of those states are expected to have compatible seasons with the federal season. Texas we expect to have a 12 day season, off of Louisiana a 9-day season, and based on Florida's current proposal, a 21 day season. I'm no happier than anyone with where we are right now. And I think we need to find a way to get everyone on the same page in terms of red snapper management, and we need to find a way to add more days to the recreational season.

And most importantly we've got to find a way to stabilize the recreational fishery so that the season doesn't continue to get shorter every year. So, I'm here to try and respond to your questions, and so we will go ahead and start with the first question.

Coordinator: If participants would like to ask a question, please press star 1 and record your name. One moment for our first question. Our first question is from (Jim), your line is open.

(Jim): This is (Jim), can you hear me Dr. Crabtree?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes (Jim), good morning.

(Jim): Good morning. Just one short question here, because of the state's actions you had to close the entire federal waters, will that affect commercial fishermen with IFQs?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well I don't anticipate that happening this year because right now I don't anticipate that federal waters are actually closed year round anywhere. So, with where we are right now, (EZ) will be open for some period of time off of all of the states, and I don't anticipate that this has an impact on the commercial fishermen.

(Jim): But if you do close all of the federal waters, or even say the federal waters off Florida, will the commercial fishermen still be able to fish with IFQs?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well that just depends on the situation, but right now we're anticipating a 21 day recreational season off of Florida, and so I don't anticipate any impact from the commercial fishery at this point.

(Jim): Okay, thank you.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (John), your line is open.

(John): Hello Dr. Crabtree.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Morning.

(John): Good morning. I'm a recreational fisherman out of Cocodrie, Louisiana, and I'm troubled by this 9-day federal season. It seems to be some type of a calculation on you all's behalf that there's going to be a lot of snapper caught in Louisiana waters under the state seasons, when just as a practical matter the water depths that we have make it extremely difficult to catch red snapper in state waters. I was just curious about the methodology that you all used to determine this 9-day season.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes, well I'll preface it by saying that it's a very difficult estimation for us to make. There has been a lot of discussion about just how many fish are available in - to be caught in Louisiana state waters. And as I'm sure you're aware there's apparently a debate about where Louisiana state waters even extend to, and that's made all of this complicated.

But in the recreational survey that we have, anglers indicate whether they caught the fish in federal waters or state waters, so we went back and looked at last year's landing data for Louisiana. We estimated the percentage of the private boat landings that were caught in state waters, and then we calculated the number of days that Louisiana would be open outside of the federal season. We then, because those are weekend days and we know that weekend effort is higher than weekday effort, we expanded the catch rates to reflect that.

And then because Louisiana's adopted a three fish bag limit, we assume that anyone who last year caught two fish would likely catch three fish, and so that expanded the catches more. And then we put additional expansion in there because we know we're going to have some effort shifting and some compliance problems. And then we multiplied that catch rate from the - by the total number of days Louisiana is open when federal waters are closed, and

then we basically deducted that out of the number of fish that Louisiana was expected to catch based on last year.

And then we shortened up the federal season so that the combination state water catches and federal water catches balance out. Now, how accurate the date reported on whether fish were caught in state waters, federal waters is, I don't know. And we're in a pretty uncertain situation, I will grant you on estimating this.

In the email that was sent out from Allison to all of you, I believe there is a link to our Website, and if you go to that link on our Website, there is a paper posted there on the calculation of the state water season closure dates. And that paper goes into great detail on how all of these numbers were estimated, and you can look at that and get a lot more information on that.

(John): Thank you, can I follow up real quick?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Certainly.

(John): Does - I guess I'm trying to be delicate in asking this question but it seems to me like, as a recreational fisherman, there's almost an admission with this 9-day season that people are going to be catching snapper in federal waters and bringing them back to the dock under the state season. Do you agree with that conclusion?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well so we looked back at the last time we had a situation like this, and we had in - I think it was in 2006, Florida left state waters open after the federal season. And when we looked at the reported landings, when Florida state waters were open and federal waters were closed, there were in fact fish reported landed that were caught in the (EZ).

Now we are enforcing the red snapper closure in federal waters, and we recognize federal waters beginning at three miles out. But, I suspect there will be some folks who may fish in federal waters when they're not supposed to.

(John): Thank you very much.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Steve), your line is open.

(Steve): Dr. Crabtree this is (Steve), I'm just - I'm listening to what you're saying and I hear that there's a lot of assumption going on with the calculations as well, but we're making an assumption that there will be more - I'm out of Florida and I'm also out of the central Saint Pete Clearwater area. Anyway, but we're making a lot of assumptions that there will be more recreational fishermen catching fish, and I don't understand how we come up with that assumption that more fishermen are going to be out there because the season's going to be shorter.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well we aren't really making that assumption for this year. We're basically assuming the effort patterns are similar to what they were last year. And, I think effort was up a little bit last year from the previous couple of years, but actually right now recreational effort in federal waters in the gulf has been low, probably because of the economy.

Now, we have, in past years, seen (trips) shift into the open season and in the past when Florida state waters were open and federal waters were closed we saw shifts in effort shift into state waters out of federal waters. But we're not making the assumption that the overall amount of effort will be that much different than it was last year. That answer your question?

(Steve): Well yes, and I have one other thing - I mean, I just - I, you know, I mean in the charter business, have you considered making a different zones? Because our distance that we have to travel to get to the waters, 80, 90 feet, 100 feet of water is, you know, 30, 40 miles out versus, you know, up in the Panhandle area it's a much shorter distance.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Right, and I live here in Saint Pete myself so I'm very aware of that. That is one of the problems with the situation we find ourselves in this year is it is - it's not very equitable to folks. If you live up in the Panhandle area, you've got red snapper available in state waters, but in south Florida, here in the Tampa area, you don't really have snapper available to you in state waters. So the impacts of this aren't really very evenly distributed.

And then with the federally permitted charter vessels, they're not allowed to fish other than when the federal season is open. So built into all of these calculations is the assumption that the charter boats are only going to be fishing when federal waters are open and not when state waters are open and federal waters are closed. So really the charter vessels - federally permitted charter vessels probably lose more time on the water than anyone does as a result of this.

(Steve): Which affects the economy.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: It does, and so this is an unfortunate situation that I don't really think benefits anyone. And so I think we need to continue to have discussions with the state and the Gulf Council and find a better way to do business that allows us to all to get back onto the same page in terms of the season. But, we have not been able to get to that point yet.

Now, I will add into all of this that there is a new stock assessment underway, and I expect that we will begin to see some of the results of that in a few weeks, and it will all be finished by the end of May. And I think there are a lot of reasons to believe that we will be able to increase the total allowable catch and increase the quotas later this year. In fact, the Gulf Council meets next the week of April 15, and I expect that they will ask for an emergency rule to increase the quotas.

And so if that all comes true and we do get an increase in the total allowable catches as a result of the new assessment, I then expect that we will have a second recreational red snapper season and that we will be reopening the fishery at some point during the summer or maybe even in the fall. But until we have the new assessment results and see how many pounds of fish we're talking about, I don't have an estimate of how many days that would be.

(Steve): All right, well I thank you for your time sir. It just - it definitely affects, you know, the charter guys, you know, the smaller charter guys because they have boats only do their every once a week or twice a week they go out that far but, you know, the charter guys, it's sort of hard to explain to a customer that, you know, what you have to do and of course we're regulated by the federal laws instead of just the state laws, we have to follow federal. And you stated that so I appreciate your time sir, thank you.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes I appreciate that and I reckon that, and I think you're right that the impact of this is greatest on the charter fishermen than anyone else, and I think that's something that the council's going to need to address.

(Steve): All right, well I look forward to speaking with you again sir, thank you.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Okay, thanks for calling.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Harry), your line is open.

(Harry): Yes Dr. Crabtree, can you hear me?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes sir, afternoon.

(Harry): I've got several questions but I understand for time I'll just ask this one, why in the gulf the way you all set the total allowable catch do you go by poundage on red snapper versus the number of red snapper?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well that's just the way it's been historically is the quotas have been given to us in pounds. Now we've have some discussion at the council meetings of late about changing the recreational quota into numbers of fish. And in fact we've asked with this new stock assessment that they give us the option of setting the recreational quota in numbers of fish as opposed to pounds, and so the council, I think, would be able to make that change and have that done for next year.

And there are some advantages to that in that the recreational catch estimates in numbers of fish are more precise than the estimates in pounds. And so I think there may be some advantages to doing that, although I don't believe that will substantially change the numbers of days or the season lengths. But at any rate, I think that's something that could be done and the council will be talking about that probably in their June council meeting and may make that change for next year.

(Harry): If you don't mind, what I was - you know, it seems like we're being told that because the fish are - weigh more that the season's being shortened. And that's why I was wondering why, you know, if that is the case, why the - you all's

management would not benefit more by going to the numbers versus the poundage.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes, and we're going to take a look at that, and it is accurate to say that the average size of the fish that are being landed has increased faster than the stock assessment indicates the average pounds of the fish in the water is going up. Now there are a couple of reasons why that could be the case. One could be the stocks rebounding faster than the stock assessment projected that it would.

And we may find out about that when we get the new stock assessment. The other thing that could be going on is since the fishing's so good right now and it's not that difficult to catch a big fish, people may just be more selective about what fish they're keeping. And so they may be - they may not keep a fish until they get a really big one, and I suspect there is some of that going on as well. So that's something I think we do need look at with the new stock assessment.

(Harry): Okay. Thank you, sir.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Thank you.

Coordinator: And our next question comes from (William), your line is open.

(William): You just answered my question. I wanted to know why you based the total outlook catch on pounds or not on number of fish?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Okay. You got another one there?

(William): No, I don't think so at the moment. Maybe I'll be back later.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: All right. Okay, thanks.

Coordinator: And our next question is from (Steve). Your line is open.

(Steve): Yes, Dr. Crabtree. My question is with the impact on the economy that recreational fishermen create through coming from other states, you know, eating at restaurants et cetera, it is a bigger impact on the overall economy of the Gulf Coast for us to have more fishing days than it is for the commercial. I understand you're only involved in the health of the snapper population but would it not improve everybody's situation to increase the total liable catch percentage wise more lean toward the recreational fisherman rather than the commercial quota?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well the Council is responsible for setting the allocations for the commercial and recreational fishermen and right now it is 51% commercial and 49% recreational. And that is an allocation that was put in place a long time ago, back in 1990 and is based on what the mix of landings was thought to be back in the early 1980s. Now there are a lot of recreational fishermen who want to see the allocation revisited and I think it is time that the Council review that allocation, and they are in the process of doing that.

In fact, there's an amendment 28 to the re-fish plan that is looking at alternatives that would change how future tack increases are divided up between the recreational commercial fishery and it looks at shifting more of future impact or tack increases to the recreational fishery. That's going to be taken up again by the Council at their June Council meeting, and I don't know what they're going to decide to do about that.

There are strong feelings amongst both recreational and commercial fishermen so it'll be a difficult decision for the Council to make but I would urge you to pay particular attention to the next series of Council meetings, and to talk to the Council members from your state and make your views known because they are going to be looking at that very issue.

(Steve): Thank you very much for your time.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Thank you.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Steve), your line is open.

(Steve): Dr. Crabtree?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes, sir.

(Steve): Hey, I was just curious how much credibility and credence has been given to the studies that have been done and the papers that have been published by Dr. Bortone and (Dr. Shift). It seems to me that there's - instead of having a red snapper problem, in the North Gulf of Mexico, I'm from Pensacola and spend a fair number of days for the last 30 years sometimes up to 50, 60 days per year actually experiencing what's in the North Gulf.

It seems to me we got a data problem instead of a snapper problem. Could it be the fact that we're not counting in the formulas the fish that actually live on artificial reefs and in the oil rigs in the Gulf, that that skews the formula that the Council has set in place as per the Magnuson Act?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well that's a topic that's come up pretty much every stock assessment over I don't know at least the last decade or so.

(Steve): Do the formulas actually count the fish that live on those wrecks and rigs because I know they count the fish that we catch off those wrecks and rigs.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes, so in the sense that the stock assessment is based in part on the landings and the ages of the fish that are landed, and probably a high percentage of the recreational landings come off of artificial reefs, and so in that sense they are factored into the stock assessment and the catch per unit effort that happens with recreational fishermen off of those structures. That factored in. Now there...

(Steve): Go ahead I'm sorry.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: There are other sources of data that go into the stock assessment. Some of the long-line survey for example. That obviously doesn't sample on artificial reefs because it would get all tangled up on them if it did and it's a deeper water survey that was set up to try and sample the older fish that aren't that well represented in the commercial or recreational catch.

And we've done some video survey work over the years that I think has been more focused on natural bottom than artificial reef, but there has been some work done by I think Dr. (Ship) and Dr. (Powers) out of Dolphin Island surveying snapper around some of the artificial reef and that data's been provided to the assessment folks, and I think it is being incorporated into the assessment that's being done. So I think the new assessment probably will have more information that's directly related to targeting fish on artificial reefs. Now, how much difference that's going to make and how it's going to come out, I don't know because I haven't - the assessment's not completed yet and I haven't seen it.

But even with all that, I think if you look at the history of red snapper it's very hard I think to argue that the stock wasn't over fished in the past because we've seen a remarkable recovery over the past ten years and we've seen the stock reestablish itself down the whole west coast of Florida where they really had disappeared for a long period of time.

But there's always uncertainty in stock assessment and there are always gaps in the data, and the scientists try to come up with the best assessment they can but there are always uncertainties there and it's always possible stock is in better shape or potentially worse shape than the assessment indicates. But I do think the data has improved and that this will be by far the best stock assessment we've ever had on red snapper.

(Steve):

Well the catch effort also, I'm not sure how you've adjusted the catch effort downward. I can - I've been pretty well in contact with a number of fisherman along the North Gulf of Mexico and there's a disproportionate number of folks that some of it is due to the economy, negative economic impact and they've sold boats and gotten out of the offshore fishing industry or business, but they're - not business meaning for compensation but just for pleasure and enjoyment. But I'm telling you, a large part of it is and a good number of my friends have sold their offshore boats and it's not because of the economy and their business or their financial situation.

It's because of these regulations. It's just not worth it for them to make an effort to buy \$4.50 (mariner) fuel, and you know, and maintain a six figure type boat and just catch a couple fish for a few days out of the year and few days out of those 27 there are a significant number of weather days and whatnot. It's just a - they've given up and gone - they bought a bay boat and/or have taken up golf or some other hobby. So I don't know how much that catch

effort has been adjusted down because I - let me tell you, it's just not there out in the Gulf.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well if you look at the overall effort levels in the federal waters of the Gulf and the trends over time, what you saw was just a dramatic decrease in effort starting in 2008, 2009. So when the economy turned south at that point effort fell way off. Probably the highest effort we saw in the Gulf was 2004 and 2005 and it did turn way down and it has not recovered back up to the levels that it was. Although I think it has turned up at...

(Steve): How do those dates correlate with the increased regulatory environment from the Council regarding red snapper? Hasn't there been a correlation there also around those dates that the regulation would increase their shorter number of seasons?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: We started tightening the restrictions on red snapper really in 2006, in 2007, so...

(Steve): So we can call it slow economy and some regulations and that sort of thing? But I just think there's a significantly lesser amount of pressure on the fish, you know, due to both of those reasons. I just didn't know if that was factored into the formulas or as you said before you're using this catch shares deal going - dating way back to the 80s, to the early 80s and I didn't know how much you left into the formulas.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: The trends and effort are definitely taken into account in the assessment and effort is certainly dropped off. And I don't dispute at all that some people have stopped fishing because of the regulation but I think that the more pervasive impact on overall recreational effort - because we saw it go down virtually everywhere. It went down in the South Atlantic. It's not just Gulf, so

just general recreational effort fell off when the economy went down, which makes sense because people - a lot of people lost jobs and just didn't have the money to go but that is factored in to the assessments.

Coordinator: And our next question comes from (Steve). Your line is open.

(Steve): Thank you. I'm from Lake Charles, Louisiana and I fish recreationally out of Port Fourchon, which are at opposite ends of the state and there's a couple of issues here. First off I feel like Louisiana has really been penalized because if you look at the ten mile limit anything that is pretty much west of Fourchon is not going to have access to a red snapper fishery because it's so shallow out there. And if you take a look at the three mile limit, I don't care if you're at (Fourchon or mouth of) the river you're pretty much going to have a zero catch because it's just not that deep.

And so my concern is that if you're going to give us 9-days in the federal waters based on these assumptions of going out and catching fish, if we're catching fish in state waters at three that ought to be zero. If we're catching at ten miles then you need to have the Coast Guard stop enforcing the three mile limit because we're really in a, you know, in a damned if we do, damned if we don't situation down here.

Before you answer that question, I do want to say I agree with the weekend fishery that you guys have been doing, but anyway. And the other thing is that with the oil rigs we have off Texas and Louisiana, why don't we have an east/west zone with the snapper like we do king mackerel? Now I'm finished, thank you sir.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Okay. Well I agree with you we're not in a good situation in Louisiana and I think it's unfortunate. Now we will continue to enforce all federal regulations

starting at three miles because that is where the state water boundary is off Louisiana and that's where it's going to be unless the US Congress decides to change it. And we basically had to go with what were reported in the fishery surveys in terms of landings from state waters and federal waters but I grant you there could be fair amount of uncertainty there. And I think you asked me something about the rigs but I'm not - I don't remember exactly what it was.

Allison Garrett: ...the east/west.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Oh the east/west Gulf divide. Well the stock assessment is broken up for red snapper in the Western Gulf and Eastern Gulf are treated differently, there is mixing but there's does tend to be a bit of a break around the mouth of the river, so that would be a decision the Council could make would be to set separate tacks for the Eastern and Western Gulf that would be something that would be up to them if they wanted to do it. They had not gone that way in the past but that doesn't mean they couldn't do that in the future and there would be a biological basis for doing that I believe.

(Steve): Okay. So basically they could do that, they just haven't. And you would think with all the structures out here and the difference in the other structures that they would take that into consideration. I hope you will recommend that to them and - but it sounds like basically this season I either run the risk of getting arrested in, you know, six or seven, or eight miles offshore or just don't snapper fish.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well my advice to you would be to follow the regulations and stay out of trouble that way. And my hope is we can find a better solution and get out of this mess if not this year, then certainly for next year because I do not want to be sitting here a year from now in this same position next year. So, I would

urge all of you to urge your state representatives and folks on the Council to try and find a better solution to this problem than where we are right now.

(Steve): And our 9-day limit is based upon people catching fish ten miles offshore or is it three miles?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: It's based upon state water catches but it recognizes that there will be some effort shift and probably some compliance problems. And one of the big factors in the length of your season is the increase in the bag limit. That makes a substantial difference in the season length going from two to three fish now because a lot of the people who go fishing are able to limit out these days. But you go for two to three fish bag limit and you lose a lot of days because of that.

(Steve): That's a valid point but not within three miles. If we're fishing within three miles we're not catching any.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well that begs the question of why is the state opening up state waters if there are no fish there? But that's not a question I can answer.

(Steve): Thank you, sir.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Thank you.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (David). Your line is open.

(David): Dr. Crabtree?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes, sir.

(David): Okay, most of my questions have been answered. How much is the Magnuson-Stevens Act hamstringing you as far as your ability to adjust the regulations?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well the major constraint in the Magnuson Act when it was reauthorized that has affected things is the provision that the Councils are not allowed to exceed the fishing level recommendation that comes out of the science. So, when we - and this will happen in May when the Council's Scientific and Statistical Committee meet, when they give us a catch level that's the ceiling and we have to stay below that.

Now you can think of that what you will but that was put in place to ensure that Councils didn't allow over fishing to put in place and then the other important change was the requirement that we have annual catch limits in all of our fisheries. Now, for red snapper there's been a requirement in the statute for - since the mid-1990s that we had definite catch limits for the recreation and commercial fisheries but until the reauthorization it wasn't required in all of our other fisheries. You know those are probably the most significant changes to the statute that the Councils have had to deal with.

(David): One other question. With the abundance of red snapper is the (gov) Council looking at the impact on the other reef fish species?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well you know we're trying to and I think the biggest move in fishery management now particularly in science is to try to move towards more ecosystem type assessments, multi-species assessments that do just what you're talking about but try to take into account how species interact with each other because we know some species eat other species and they compete for food and some eat the eggs and larvae of others. The problem with it is that we don't really have the data that's required to run those multi-species

models in a way that gives you enough confidence in the results to base management decisions on.

You know we're still struggling with doing single species assessments and getting the public to buy in with the results from those. So, that's where things are heading but we've got a ways to go before we really get to multi-species assessments but I don't think there's any question but that at stocks like red snapper rebuild and expand their ranges, it's having impacts on the ecosystems and probably is having impacts on other stocks. We just at this point don't have a good way of understanding exactly what those are.

(David): Thank you, Dr. Crabtree.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Thank you.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Tom). Your line is open.

(Tom): Good morning, Dr. Crabtree. How are you doing?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Good morning, (Tom). How are you?

(Tom): Doing fine thank you. You mentioned a couple times this morning that we need to get everyone on the same page. I don't see any plan on the table to manage everyone on the same page. Coming up with these different pilot programs we divide the recreational fishermen into either head boat IFQs or charter for hire, days at sea and there is virtually nothing - there are no pilot programs for any private wrecks so, why is there no plan on the table for managing all recreational fishermen on the same page?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well that's sort of what we're doing right now I think. We have one recreational quota and one recreational season. It's a little different because we have permits for charter boats and we have a moratorium on them and some passenger limitations but I'd say historically we have managed it with everyone the same and the problem is no one's happy with where we are right now.

And what I hear from fishermen all the time is what we're doing is it's not working and so I understand that the head boat cooperative which you're referring to and people aren't aware of that we put out for public comment a couple of days ago a request for an exempted fishing permit for a head boat cooperative and that would assign, I think it's 13 head boats that are - would be in it and they would be assigned a quantity of red snapper for next year's season and each vessel would get so many fish but then they'd be able to fish them whenever they want to.

Now, we haven't made any decision about whether we're going to approve this or yet but we have put it out for public comment. But I guess where I am (Tom), is I hear all the time that what we're doing and where we are isn't working so it seems to me we have an obligation then to try and think of different ways of doing things and give some them a look and see if we can't provide - find a better way to manage these fisheries because if we - it seems like where we've been of late is almost every idea that anyone comes up with to make a change to red snapper management there's a constituency that comes in who's adamantly opposed to it, and then at the end of the day we don't do it.

So we're - almost become prisoners of the status quo and we don't seem to be able to break through into trying something different and find a better way to manage the fishery. Now, there are a number of other proposals floating

around but one is for some type of regional management where we might allow the states more independence in terms of setting the season lengths and the bag limit and that's something the Council's looking at and we had a number of discussions with the states about that but you know if we're not happy with where we are with the fishery right now I think we sort of have an obligation to try and look at different ways of doing business.

(Tom): Right. But, you know, everything is pointing - that's on the table is pointing towards implementing catch shares or IFQs. I have presented a plan to the Council that would - OFS permanent plan, that would use today's technology, either cell phones or iSnapper, to really greatly upgrade the data timeframe because the lag in the data is a really big - the lag and the uncertainty and I believe the unreliability of the data is the biggest problem that we're facing today in our Gulf recreational fisheries. And if we were able to implement the OFS permanent plan both permanent with a mandated tail out, tail in that treats everyone under the same management without gifting our public trust resources to a select few people.

So, I'm just asking for you all to try that on a pilot program basis and that way I think it would give a lot of credence in engaging the fisherman and in the process and having a larger buy in to the management so I'm just asking you all to do that if you all can do that.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Okay. Well I appreciate that and we did have a recreational advisory panel meet sometime in the last couple of months. I don't remember exactly when but it was basically a group of recreational fishermen who met to talk about data collection issues and that report will be presented to the Council at the April meeting. And there's I think a two and a half hour meeting of the data collection committee scheduled for that and we're going to have some of the representatives from the marine recreational survey come to that.

And we're going to hear the final - and have the final report on an electronic log book pilot study with charter boats that was done. And I think there are a number of proposals on the table right now for electronic log books, particularly in the for hire fishery but also some sort of way to use electronic reporting for even the private sector for catch reporting . So, people looking at that and the Council's talking about it, and we'll see where that goes.

Coordinator: The next question comes from (Scott). Your line is open.

(Scott): Good morning, Dr. Crabtree. How are you doing?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Good morning, (Scott). How are you?

(Scott): Oh just enjoying a pretty cool morning here in Texas. Hey I had a question. It would pertain to the 2013 season. Has anybody at the fishery service or your staff run any numbers on what the federal season would look like with 30B not in effect? Where the charter boats could fish in state waters and what that federal season would look like if we were able to participate in the state water fisheries in addition to a federal fishery?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well, we're trying to take a look at that, it's kind of complicated and it varies from state to state. It would have a big impact in Texas because I think 70 - almost 75% of the landings in Texas last year were from the for hire sector, mainly head boats.

(Scott): That's correct.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: So, if they were able to fish year around in state waters, I think it would have a very large impact on the Federal water season and it's less in the other states

but it would shorten the Federal water season by various amounts in all of the states. But I don't have specific numbers on that yet but we're going to be having some discussions about a number of these quantities, I'm sure.

(Scott): Do you think that those numbers would be ready at the Council meeting when - if 30B does come back into discussion at this next meeting in Gulfport?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well we'll probably have at minimum some rough estimates.

(Scott): Very good. That was my only question. So I appreciate it.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Okay (Scott).

Coordinator: The next question comes from (Clint). Your line is open.

(Clint): Hi this is Captain Clint. I'm from St. George Island, Florida. I got one question but I also got three things. Keeping up with the recreation fishermen, how many they catch and all that stuff, do you think they should maybe put like a \$5.00 surcharge on their fishing license for a year to get a more accurate count because all fishing license, you know, they're bay fishing or whatever?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well you know all the fishing licenses - recreational fishing licenses in the Gulf are issued by the state, so that'd be something that the states would have to do and for most of the Gulf states they would have to go to their legislatures to increase the fees on those permits. Now we do issue permits to the charter boats in the Gulf but we are limited under the Magnuson Act to only charge an administrative fee. And that means when we issue a permit to anyone, we can only charge what it actually costs us to issue the permit.

And the funding that we get from those permits goes straight to the US Treasury and doesn't come to the fishery service. So, under the current Magnuson Act it's not possible for us to create a permit and then use the money for data collection and that would take an act of Congress to make a change to the statute. So the only way for something like you're talking about to happen would be if the states decided to do it and they could do that but it would probably take some time to get to it.

(Clint): I understand. What about the minimum? How come the minimum size hasn't gone up? It's been 16 forever?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well I don't think the Council's ever seen much of a reason to raise it. Generally, I think the feeling's become that the minimum size for red snapper doesn't do much of anything right now, because most of the fish coming in are pretty large. And it originally was put at 16 inches to try and lengthen the season out some, but I think at this point, most of the fish that are coming in, the last estimate I saw as the average weight of the fish coming in is seven, almost eight pounds, and that's a lot bigger fish than 16 inches.

(Clint): Yes.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: The concern with raising it much higher than that is it just causes people to discard more fish. To be honest with you, of late I've heard more people come in with wanting a maximum size to try and keep the fish size landed from going up as much. But, you know, the problem with that is, it's going to result in a lot of big fish thrown over the side, and I don't know that we want to do anything to increase discards.

(Clint): Right. Well, I do it all day long. That's all I do. Throw stuff back. I've been fishing for the last two weeks, and I mean, if you can't (limit) on a red

snapper, you've never been fishing in your life, because it takes about five minutes. But anyways, I just got one more little question.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes?

(Clint): Why is the - I am a federal permit holder in Florida. Why is it that I can't just fish state waters during like - as of right now, Franklin County, which is where I live, gag grouper is opened in state waters as of Monday, but because I have a federal permit, I can't catch some. Could you just give me real quick why I couldn't do that?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes. For most of our fisheries in both the Gulf and the South Atlantic, not all of them, but for most of the fisheries, and this is true with highly migratory species as well, by and large we have a requirement that if you have a federal permit, you have to abide by the federal regulations. So that's just part of the deal when you choose to get a federal permit, you're signing on and agreeing to abide by the federal regulations, unless the state has more restrictive regulations. And that was put in place to try and help us control the catches and prevent over fishing and avoid going over these annual catch limits.

It generally doesn't have an impact on people, because we have, for the most part over the years, been able to keep the regulations fairly consistent between federal waters and state waters. But there are times when we get out of kilter a little bit, like we are now with red snapper, and then I'm aware of those, I think it's three counties that are open on gag grouper. But that requirement's there to try and help control the catches and keep us from exceeding the catch limit.

Coordinator: And our next question comes from (Tim). Your line is open.

(Tim): Yes, Mr. Crabtree, this is (Tim) from Tallahassee.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Afternoon.

(Tim): Well, most of my questions have actually been addressed. I just wanted to now give some general comments, just from - you know, the data problem has been thoroughly discussed. I just - I'm afraid we're going to lose a whole generation of fishermen just as mentioned earlier, it's too expensive and it's too hard to go out. I just have been fishing the Gulf for 20 years, can remember back in the 90s and early 2000s when the seasons were April to October. You couldn't catch your limit of four, they just weren't there.

And then local areas have invested a lot of funds to put reefs out, attract the fish in, the fish are here now as mentioned previously, I mean, you can't go out and not catch them. But now, you can't really fish for them, and I mean you can, but you have a lot shorter limit. It just seems to be ironic how when the seasons were long, the fish weren't there.

Now the fish are here and the seasons are shorter. I'm just afraid that a lot of people, you know, as in myself, and you just - you don't have the desire to spend the money and go out and bring your kids out. And I'm just - I'm afraid we could lose a generation. I also feel like with these smaller limits and shorter seasons - I'm not a biologist, but I know how many fish get thrown back, and you watch the barracudas and the sharks and the dolphins, and you know, are we really accomplishing anything when you throw back?

You try to catch a grouper and you throw back. I know the proper handling and proper venting I've tried to do, but you can't prevent the ten fish you threw back trying to catch a grouper and a dolphin or a shark or something comes

and eats it, I mean, I just, you know, sometimes I wonder are we really accomplishing what wanted to be accomplished?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes, and I know it's difficult and we're going through a difficult time right now. I do think we're accomplishing a lot, really. I mean, I believe we are rebuilding red snapper in the Gulf, and I think all of you folks are seeing it in how great the fishing is out there. And the problem we've got, though, is we're not, at least according to the last assessment, we're not there yet.

(Tim): Yes.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: And so we've still got some difficulties to deal with. But I do think the quotas are going to continue to increase and we're going to have a great fishery. And we're starting to see some of the benefits from management in any number of fisheries. You know, we've had a black sea bass fishery over in the South Atlantic that in some ways were similar to red snapper in that we've seen the recreational season get shorter and shorter every year.

But we've got a new stock assessment now which is going to be reviewed by the South Atlantic Council's SSC next week, and at least the draft that we have right now indicates that the stock has been rebuilt. And if that's approved by the SSC, then they're going to be looking at a substantial increase in the catch levels over there, and I think a substantially longer recreational season. And, you know, I've been hearing for the last couple of years over there how many black sea bass there are and how big they are and how great the fishing is.

So we're starting to see benefits. We just - earlier this year, the South Atlantic Council voted to remove a five-month recreation vermillion snapper closure, and do away with that. The Gulf Council has voted to do away with the two-

month shallow water grouper recreational closure in February and March, and so I expect that will be off the books next year. We raised the red grouper bag limit in the Gulf recently. I think the gag season this year will probably be longer than it was last year.

So, you know, there's - it's difficult to end overfishing and it's difficult to rebuild stocks, but I would say in the Southeast region as a whole right now, we're raising more quotas than we're lowering. So, I hope we're going to see things turning around and starting to improve and start providing more fishing opportunities to folks than we've had in the past, although I don't think you're going to see the days where we have year-round fisheries for many of these stocks like we had 10, 15 years ago.

But like you said, back when you could go anytime you wanted, the fishing wasn't very good. So I hope we don't lose the generation of fishermen, and I personally don't think we will because I think we're going to see a tremendous fishery and that that's going to cause people to continue to want to go fishing.

(Tim): Yes, I appreciate it, and I definitely think that it makes differences. I guess you had already hit on, and I think it's a good idea, for the regional management, because again, I know there's areas that I think is in conjunction with the regulations, but it's also in conjunction with the same places I used to fish. You had, you know, a couple dozen places you fish, now I have hundreds and hundreds of reefs, man-made, that we've done that have brought the fish in.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes.

(Tim): But, you know, so I do - I would like you just to consider, or I do feel like possible the different regions could have different limits. Because the quantity of the fish are there...

Dr. Roy Crabtree: That's definitely...

(Tim): ...in some areas.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes, that's definitely something the council is considering.

(Tim): Okay.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Thank you.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Michael). Your line is open.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: (Michael), are you there?

(Michael): Sorry, can you hear me?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes, sir.

(Michael): Okay. Sorry about that. Dr. Crabtree, I like things explained in simple terms, and if I heard you correctly, you said that the stocks are recovering, and I think everybody would agree with that if you ever get out there and fish, they're everywhere. And you also say that there's less effort out there. What is the single X-factor on why there's only 9-days in our season in Louisiana?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well, we basically look at the rate fish were caught last year and assume it's going to be similar this year. And the trick with Louisiana was trying to

estimate how many would be caught when state waters were open and federal waters were closed. And I think in the Louisiana season, there's about 76 days where state waters would be open and federal waters would be closed.

And we try to balance the state water catch with the federal water catch, so that Louisiana's overall share of the catch is about the same, it's where it was last year. Now, how close we're going to come, it's difficult to say, because when we get in situations like we're in with Louisiana right now, it's very difficult to have an accurate measure or projection of what we think's going to be caught. So I think the problem we need to deal with is figuring out a way to get the federal season and the state water season on the same page.

Regional management may be a way to get to that. But I just don't think it's good for anybody, and definitely not good for fishermen, when you've got state waters open and federal waters closed. So we need to figure out a better way to resolve this.

(Michael): Okay. And if reasonable management might be a better way to do that, it looks like Louisiana is trying to push fisheries management to regional management. Is this move by Louisiana a reason why the feds have decided to shorten the season? Or, in simpler terms, is Louisiana's move to move towards regional management a political retaliation point for the feds?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: No. I mean, I don't have a problem with going to regional management and if that's where the Council wants to go, that's fine. The trick with regional management is to make it clean and simple, you need all of the states to agree to do it, and the way I envisioned that it would go is we would just delegate to the states the authority to set the season length and to set the bag limit. And then you'd have to allocate some amount of pounds to each state to reflect

their share of the overall recreational quota, and then that state would be responsible for setting its season and its bag limit.

And provided they did it in a way that, you know, made a good faith effort to stay within their allocation, I'm fine with going down that path. And the trick has been getting all of the other states to decide if they're prepared to go down that path, and that takes some time, and we're just not there yet. And so we're talking, but, you know, this is just about trying to constrain the catches and that's what it's about.

But I think the council is going to continue to talk about regional management, and maybe that's where we'll wind up next year. Regional management gets much more complicated if there's just one state wants to do it and not the others, because then you end up with federal waters open to the residents of one state at one time of year and open to the residents of other states at different times of year.

And there are a lot of people who live in one state but they fish off another state, and so it gets complicated and they get figuring out who's allowed to fish where and when. And so we'll see where that goes. But I'm definitely not opposed to regional management.

(Michael): Okay, one follow-up question on that - I know there's a lot of public comment that you guys receive on this issue. What, if you can name them, what are the groups or the types of individuals who are for federal management?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: That are for federal management?

(Michael): Yes.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well, I don't know that I've heard that many people comment specifically on that issue, I mean, right now federal management of federal waters is required under the Magnuson Act. So normally, when we have public comment and I hear people comment on things, it's more about the aspects of managing more specific things. Now, I think most of the people I know think we need the Magnuson Act and we need to manage federal waters. Now, lots of people have different views on ways the Magnuson Act ought to be changed, but I don't know very many people who would like to just get rid of it.

Coordinator: And once again, if participants would like to ask a question, please press star 1. Our next question comes from (Michael F.), your line is open.

(Michael): Are you all there, Dr. Crabtree?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes sir, I am.

(Michael): Hey, how are you doing?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Doing all right, how are you?

(Michael): I'm good. I'm going to support - I own a charter boat in Orange Beach, Alabama, I've been in business 20 years, and I'm in support of the Head Boat Pilot program. At first I wasn't, but I am now.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Okay.

(Michael): (I got that) answer and - but I have a question about it.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Right.

(Michael): All right, Federal Register Volume 78, Number 63, Section 407, I'm sure you know what I'm talking about. I'm just going to read a brief part of it. When National Marine Fisheries determines the recreational red snapper fishing quota is reached, National Marine Fisheries is required to prohibit the retention of red snapper cod during the rest of the fishing year.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes.

(Michael): Okay, you know where I'm going with this. I kind of feel like the pilot program is in lines with a study and with Louisiana, Florida, Texas - I just don't see many pounds left for anybody the following years, as long as they go non-compliant. This is going to kill that pilot program. I mean, if you all could make a motion to work on that or get rid of it...

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well...

(Michael): ...I can't see it work... yes, sir?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: So the problem I think you're talking about has to do with a section of the Magnuson Act that's specific to red snapper and that requires that we have catch limits for red snapper. And basically it requires that we have to have a separate quota for recreational fishing, which it specifically says includes charter boat fishing, and that when that quota is reached, we have to prohibit possession of red snapper at that point.

And so what that means with the Head Boat Cooperative is that if we did get into the fall of the year, and we determine the whole recreational quota has been caught, we'd have to shut everybody down, including the head boats fishing in the Cooperative. And I agree with you, that is a problem, and that will prevent the Cooperative from operating like they - in a perfect world like

you might want it to, but it is a provision in the Magnuson Act, and there's nothing that the council can do about that. We just have to deal with it right now. So I really don't have a way to fix that.

(Michael): I'm guessing we need to go catch our fish before June 1st, then.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well, in past years, we've gotten the landings in about the middle of August, or something like that. So we won't get the landing estimates from June of this year until middle of August, but the longer you wait to catch your pounds, the more at risk they are.

(Michael): Okay. Okay, I heard you a little bit ago, I think you said there was 18 boats in the Head Boat Cooperative, and I think that all permitted - re-fish permitted boats, charter boats opportunity.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: I think it's less than that. I think it's 12 or 13.

(Michael): Okay, well, I signed up for it, I haven't heard from anybody yet, but if I could get 500 red snapper a year, I could make a good living. Yes, last year, I caught approximately 240 red snappers for my customers, 46 days that we had. Forty-seven.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Right.

(Michael): Five hundred red snapper for one charter boat, it would just - it would be a tremendous help. And I know a lot of the public discussion has been against this pilot program. I've been doing this my whole life. It's all I do, it's what I do.

There's several of us in this same situation. I just fear that the state waters are going to take us so far over on the tack that there won't be nothing left in the following years.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes, it's a problem. And like I said I think several times now we need to find a solution to that. But we'll see what the public comments are on the head boat cooperative EFP, and I would encourage you to send your comment in. So you have a good day.

Coordinator: And the next question comes from (James) your line is open.

(Jim): Roy this is (Jim), I think it's the (James) she's talking about.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Hi (Jim).

(Jim): Good, how are you?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Doing all right.

(Jim): I'm curious about - I know that a couple of people have asked you about (bio mats) and you've given some reasons why you think it's probably increasing. And I agree that it's increasing, but one of the difficulties with management of this species is that they're so strongly year class dominated. And, you know, we've had kind of an unprecedented run for 2004 and 2005 in particular where we had two strong year classes back to back.

The 2006 year class was a little bit smaller and our fishery independent samples really show very clearly the dominance of those year classes in our catches not only on oil and gas platforms on which we've studied both

standing and toppled but also the shelf edge reefs. In the - why is it that you don't believe that that's an issue that we're going to be dealing with?

Because now those fish that were produced in 2004 are approaching - they're going to be nine years old this year and they're going to become less vulnerable to the fishery. And I'm wondering if you believe that since all the effort is going to be targeted on these couple of good, strong year classes in the next couple years, are you worried that escapement is not - to older age classes is not sufficient?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well I don't know (Jim), I'm - like everybody else, I'm very curious to see the new stock assessment, and what it indicates in terms of the fishing mortality rates and the projections, and we'll go with the catch level recommendations we get out of that and that's what we'll have to go with and live by.

(Jim): Well, I just - you know, I think it's probably - I think we're probably going to see a decline in the apparent abundance after these year classes move through the fishery, but I may be wrong. But I can tell you, you know, 80% of the fishes that we catch on the platforms, and on the topple platforms and standing platforms as well as on the shelf edge reefs are part of those three year classes. Their catches are really dominated by them.

I also just wanted to tell some folks who have been listening that there is some effort to get the abundance of red snapper on platforms. We are in the process of doing that and I've provided (Clay) with a bunch of information. One, was a data set that had a review of all the surveys that were done in any way on a standing platforms with respect to the abundance of red snapper.

Everything from explosive removals to diver surveys, to - we reviewed more than 1000 papers and did it, and I sent it all the (Clay). It was part of a report

that - an effort that we did to look at - for MMS to look at the potential effects of decommissioning platforms and so I not only sent him the data but also sent him the libraries that we developed in the process.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Okay, so I'm sure that they'll factor that into the assessment to the extent they can and we'll keep watching the catch rates and things, and see if we see any declines in the recreational catch rate if those big year classes move through the fishery. One thing - it seems that if we did see some decline from the catch rates we might get some more days out of the season for a given quantity of fish. But thanks for calling in (Jim).

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Daryl), your line is open.

(Daryl): Good morning Dr. Crabtree, how are you?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Good. Good morning.

(Daryl): Referring back to an earlier comment you had from an individual from the Lake Charles area discussing the punitive season that was set against the state of Louisiana for going non-compliant, more of the statement and maybe hear your comments on it. The Gulf was divided up into zones pretty much off of state lines in order to set these seasons for these non-compliant states. In doing so, and I'm sure you'll refer back to the Council on this, but I believe in my heart of hearts that your department has a lot of influence on the Council.

The eastern line for the state of Louisiana was set down the mouth of South Pass. This creating a huge inequity for the punitive 9-day season whenever you start talking about all of the tourist attraction and the charter boats and everything else to the west of that line. Basically as it's been stated several times, the state of Louisiana will have a 9-day off shore season, a 9-day (EEZ)

east season as a result of them going non-compliant, however that's not exactly true.

With that line drawn down the mouth of the river you and/or the Council - your department and/or the Council have a created a huge inequity and you've quoted effort shifts several times, and that any of the boats leaving from Fort, up and down the river and to the east of there will be enjoying a 28 day season known as a Mississippi season. Your comments on that please?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well, it was tough to figure out where to draw the line there because you've got that complex geography between Mississippi and Louisiana. So for all the other states it was pretty straightforward but there really wasn't a good place to draw that line without it being unfortunate for others. And I don't agree with your characterization of this as punitive.

It's just trying to balance the numbers and let me ask you, I mean, if we hadn't done this emergency rule we would have had to shorten the season for everybody to compensate for state water fishing going on so how would it be fair to me to go to a fisherman in Alabama who has a compliant consistent season and tell him I'm going to have to shorten your season a week because state waters in Louisiana and Texas are going to be open?

(Daryl): Well, and Dr. Crabtree I will ask you that - I will answer that question with a question as a charter for hire operator out of the state of Louisiana that is not transient, that will be in the punitive 9-day (EEZ) season and have to watch all my telephone calls dry up because they're moving to the east. You know, by the same token how is it that as a charter for hire operator who is held to the higher standard through the issuance of the permits - how is that I am punished for something I have no control over in the political environment between the state and the Feds?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well, I'm not happy about that but that's a result of state waters being opened up early, and that's what's created that problem. So as I've said, I guess we can all sit around trying to point fingers, and that's probably not a productive thing to do. What I think we need to do here is figure out how do we get out of this mess next year?

And how do we get everybody onto a consistent season so that we don't have all these inequities because I do agree with you that where we are right now produces a whole host of inequities based on where you live, and where the boundaries are and that kind of thing. That is not a good situation to be in. So, I think what we really got to get focused on is a better way to manage this fishery that we can get in place for next year so we don't have to go through this again.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Andy), your line is open.

(Andy): Hi, Dr. Crabtree, how are you?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Good, how are you?

(Andy): Good, good. Hey I was just curious, I'm in Pensacola and fished here for 30 years and I've never seen snapper anything like they are now. With the average size of the snapper increasing so dramatically why haven't things been adjusted to adjust for that increased poundage?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well, I think the only real way to adjust the catch levels and all to reflect that is to rerun the stock assessment and so we've updated it periodically. I think the last update was in 2009, and now we're doing a new assessment now. So the update in 2009 would have taken into account the fish sizes we had

probably through the 2008 season. Now we're going through a new assessment which will pull in all of that data, and update it again.

I wish we could do these assessments more often, but we have a number of different stocks we need to look at and that's always a tough decision. Now, right now the plan is we'll do this assessment this year, and then we would update it again in 2014. The assessment we're doing right now will include landings through 2011, and then we'll update it again in the second half of next year and pull in all the landings through 2012 and '13.

(Andy): Well, that just seems so far behind. I mean, it's a, you know, I understand it's probably a pretty big job, but you've got a lot of people that, you know, do this for a living, and people that enjoy fishing, the economic impacts. It just seems like if you don't have the ability to do that, there's got to be a simpler way. Maybe put some people on going around with these charter boats and finding out the fish that are being caught and the size that are being caught.

Because the snapper here have just absolutely taken over the reefs. You can't go out there and catch anything else. You can't catch grouper, you can't hardly catch amberjack. The big baits that we used to use for these fish, snapper never ate them. Now the snapper are so large that they are eating the large bait and that's all we catch.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well, let's get the new assessment and see how much improvement in the stock we see, and, you know, hopefully it's going to reflect a substantial improvement and allow us to increase these quotas and add some days to the season. And we should have all that over the next six weeks or so.

Coordinator: And our next question comes from (Mark). Your line is open.

(Mark): Good afternoon, Dr. Crabtree, how are you today?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: I'm fine, good afternoon.

(Mark): Yes, I was listening with interest on the issue with collecting, say, federal stamp dollars and translating that into a system that could be used to develop metrics on the recreational fishermen that are accessing the fishery, being able to track those fishermen more effectively in the system that are specifically targeting red snapper. I'm just curious, at your staff level at the Southeast regional office, do you have input up through NOAA and ultimately the Department of Commerce where those type of ideas can be heard before the Senate subcommittee and House subcommittee that deals with National Marine Fisheries, so that these type ideas could be perhaps heard by legislators, and then written into the re-authorization of the Magnuson Stevens? I'd like to know how that works.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well, Congress is holding some hearings. They held - the House side held a hearing a few weeks ago on Magnuson, and I'm sure that both the House and Senate will be holding hearings in the future. And generally, when they have these hearings, they invite various people to come in and give testimony, and usually it's a combination of fishermen and other constituents who come in, but they often give the fishery service opportunity to have someone provide written testimony and things, and I do have some input into those sorts of issues.

And then we're having a national conference called Managing our Nation's Fisheries in Washington in May, and that's being put on by all eight of the fishery management councils. And I think one of the themes of that is to talk about Magnuson and the issues that it (solves). There are a variety of avenues

by which the agency and constituents can highlight issues that they think ought to be addressed when Congress reopens the Magnuson Act.

(Mark): Yes, sir. I guess the other way it could be driven would be down through the states, the five Gulf states, coordinating to, you know, issue a stamp that would be, you know, uniform and to be able to pull data and it would allow targeted phone calls to stamp or permit holders, their recreational private fishermen would be able to pull data. That way it seems - and it could pay for itself if it was legislated correctly, it would appear to me.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes and something like that could probably be worked out through the Gulf States Commission. And I think the council's going to talk about something like that at the next meeting. But what we've got to figure out is, what would the cost be? Because if we had a stamp like that, then you'd have to set up a whole separate survey that was based on the people who have that stamp, and we need to look at the cost of that and make sure that we have the resources to do that.

Now, if the states created the stamp, than yes, the funds that were raised through that could then go in to support that. But as I said earlier, most of the states have to go to their legislatures to get authority to raise funds, so that takes some time to get done. But there are a lot of discussions going on about those kinds of things.

Coordinator: And once again, if participants would like to ask a question, please press star 1. Our next question comes from (William). Your line is open.

(William): First, a couple of observations, and then a question. I wonder if you're setting the final target too high for the snapper population. It seems like if you can't catch another fish now because the snapper audit is ready to get it, maybe we

don't want any more snapper out there than we've got now. Second observation is, coming home through Mississippi a couple of weeks ago on Mississippi Public Radio, they stated that Mississippi had also voted to go non-compliant. What do you know about that?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well, I think what happened in Mississippi is the legislature passed something indicating their desire to extend their state waters out for nine miles. And so I think that may have happened, but Mississippi, as far as I know, and I've talked to them very recently, is still staying compliant with their season and that they'll be open the same 28 days as the federal season.

(William): Okay, thank you. The question then, is, there's been a lot of publicity recently about a lot of red snapper, tremendous number of red snapper, being killed as they dynamite these rigs, which the law says they have to get rid of if they're not in use anymore. Is NMFS trying to do anything to alleviate that problem?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes, we've had discussions. So rig removal, you're right, it's mandated to remove idle iron, and these non-functioning rigs. And that program is all under the Department of Interior, and they control the oil wells and all that in the federal waters. So it's not something that the council or NMFS has any regulatory control over. But we have had a number of discussions with representatives of the Department of Interior about the concerns.

The Gulf Council has had discussions about potentially designating oilrigs as the central fish habitat, and they've got some advisory panels that are looking at that. And then we also in the new stock assessment have asked the scientists to try and give us some estimate of how significant the mortalities from using explosives to remove oilrigs may be. And so I'm hopeful that in the next couple of weeks, we're going to get a much more detailed study of how many red snapper, potentially, may be killed by the (use of) explosions and then

some better context to put that in with respect to how big of a fraction of the overall mortality is that.

Because right now, the study that was done on this that I think is what the Department of Interior are using was done over ten years ago. So that really needs to be looked at again, and then once we have a better idea of how significant a problem this is, we can continue those discussions with the Department of Interior. Obviously, my preference would be that we find a non-lethal way to remove these oilrigs if we have to remove them, and not have this impact on red snapper, but at the same time my understanding is that the cost difference between removing a rig with explosives versus removing it through other manners is there's a substantial difference in the cost. So it's a complicated issue, but I understand your concerns and I share those concerns, and we are talking to the Department of Interior about those.

(William): Which segment in the department is that?

Allison Garrett: BSEE.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: BSEE.

(William): Called what?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: It's what use to be the Mineral Management Service and the acronym for it is BSEE right now but I can't tell you exactly what that is. It's the Bureau of Energy and something, something. If you want to send an email to Allison and I think an invitation, you should have her email address; if you send her an email reminding her of this question then she'll get back to you with an answer.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Ray). Your line is open.

(Ray): Hi Dr. Crabtree.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Hi, (Ray).

(Ray): I was on the (rec) data AP that recently met in Tampa...

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Right.

(Ray): ...One of the biggest eye opening things for me was the - I guess the testing of the data. I mean, I look back at 1993; we had a season that was year-long, seven fish bag limit. We were catching close to 6 million pounds. The season now is - last year it was 30 days, roughly 40 days, two fish per person and we're catching about the same amount of fish.

I think the vast majority of the recreational fisherman that I talk to have absolutely no belief that those numbers that we're seeing now or maybe then, are real. That was one of our reasons for wanting to get the number of boat and people actually fishing offshore because we just don't believe the numbers. What is - you know, what are you all going to do to basically alleviate that because without doing that I think you are going to continue to see a major revolt?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes, well I'm aware that there is a lack of faith among recreational fishermen of the recreational catch estimates. There has been a big national effort over the last five or so years to improve the recreational catch estimates, and if you look at the quality of the recreational catch estimates now versus where they were a decade ago, they are much improved and I think just about any of the scientists or the folks involved with them will tell you that.

Now, we're continuing to look at ways to improve the recreational catch efforts, and particularly to improve the timeliness of those numbers because that's really one of the biggest concerns I have is the timeliness of them. And the Council at the April 15 meeting that's coming up is going to have a discussion about ways to do that but we need to make sure that, for example, if we're going to have some kind of recreational fishing permit, we need to make sure that we know exactly what we're going to do with it because we don't want to charge fishermen for a permit and go through all of that unless we know that it's going to accomplish something and it's going to result in a better way of doing things.

So, we just have to make sure that we're careful about this. Now the Council also is exploring electronic log books in the charter boat fishery and ways to do that, but again, we've got to make sure that we can validate that what's being - reporting is accurate. So I think we're making a lot of progress on that and we are improving the recreational catch estimates, and we're going to continue to work on that and work with the Councils to do that.

There are a lot of things that we would like to do right now with recreational survey but a lot of the improvements that we would like to see costs money and unfortunately right now we are in a time of what appear to be declining budgets and so that's a challenge that we're going to have to deal with. And so there are trade-offs that if we're going to put more money into improving some aspect of the recreational survey it's going to have to come out of something else that we're not going to do and we just need to be careful about how we go about that.

(Ray): One of the other things that was discussed earlier concerning regional management, I mean that's - it gets down to - also to the point of knowing how

many people are fishing. In offshore of Texas the season's in June or has been in June and I have looked at buoys, the wave heights and the offshore of Corpus Christi and compared them to the average wave heights offshore of Destin, Florida. And year after year, Texas seems to be a lot windier, it's a lot harder to get offshore during the red snapper season.

And if we're looking at possible regional management, right now the Texas state - the fish we catch in state waters is about 1% of all the red snapper fish that are caught. We need to have a system that - I mean, if we're going to base regional management on what Texas historically caught, you're going to have to know how many boats are going offshore of Texas and what we could have caught, because you know, if you go off shore of Destin it's calmer during June.

You can go off shore and catch more things or Alabama for instance. I mean they've got a huge majority of the red snapper catch off of their coast. There needs to be some sort of equity. I mean, Texas is getting penalized for each state's seasons, however you want to call it, but it's only 1%, our federal season is now 9-days and we've got to run an average of 50, 60 miles in three, four foot waves because it's windier in June, unless we account for that then you need someone in regional management, Texas is going to continue to get the shaft. I mean, has that been discusses or looked at?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well, there have been discussions about how we would allocate the recreational quota amongst the states and I expect there will continue to be discussions about that. But I would guess that be taken into account in that - I've been to Texas in June and my recollection when I was there is yes, it was windy.

Now one thing I would point out is that Texas does their own recreational catch estimates and they use a different methodology than any of the other Gulf States, so the Fishery Service. And, you know, it's a totally separate thing in terms of the Texas recreational catch estimates and Texas Parks and Wildlife provides those to us on an annual basis. But I agree with you that there is a lot to take into account when you start talking about the allocation of fish amongst the states.

Allison Garrett: And we just wanted to follow up with (William) from Mississippi who asked about BSEE and as part of the department of the interior, and that stands for the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement. Just to follow up again with (William)'s question out of Mississippi. We can take the next question.

Coordinator: And if participants would like to continue to ask questions, you may press star 1. Our next question comes from (Mark). Your line is open.

(Mark): Yes, Dr. Crabtree, I assume that's me they're talking about.

Ray Crabtree: Hi, (Mark).

(Mark): How are you doing? Most of my concerns have been semi addressed. Basically two major ones that you kind of touched on, one is the old iron, which allows the federal government or kind of puts the federal government in the position of allowing oil companies to destroy the fishery, are part of the fishery, in relinquishing these old rigs, and the other one is the major problem that recreational fisherman have with the way the data is collected concerning the recreational effort. You stated earlier in this conversation that the - you know, our seasons have increased and our catch limits have increased greatly over the past few years.

But going back 15 years to the red grouper fishery here in Florida in the Gulf coast and the snapper fishery, most of our fishery has been taken away, first, before you guys have given any of it back. And so that - those of us who have been historical fishermen here for years have seen the decline - the great decline in our ability to catch fish, due to regulation and then we're told every time we get one fish back from the government, regulation has eased, how great that is and how good this plan is working. So it's tough for the recreational fisherman to kind of follow along the methodology of these regulations.

But the major concern is how you guys get this data. Here in Florida I know were questioned at the boat ramp as to what fish we've caught, where we caught them, how many days we've fished, things like that. And I have been questioned by individuals who couldn't even tell that I was putting my boat in the water and hadn't even fished yet. So it raises a lot of questions, how does the commission really plan to try to address this lack of credible science on which you base these figures?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well there was a review of the recreational survey back in 2006 I think, national review of it, and they came up with quite a few criticisms of the way the recreational survey was done. And so the fishery service has spent the last five years with pulling together teams of scientist from the states and universities to address those criticisms and make changes to improve the survey.

And so all the methodology in the way the estimates are being done now has changed from how they were done in the past. For some species, it made a big difference in the estimates and others they didn't come out all that much different. So, there have been a lot of improvements made to the survey and the methodology it's used.

Now you can defiantly improve the estimates further, one way would be to do more of these dock side interviews like you're talking about which are done by, here in Florida, are done by the Florida - people who work for the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission. And we would like to be able to do more of those surveys, but that takes money.

And we're also making improvements to get the effort estimates by focusing on fishing license database and things like that. So I think the surveys are improving, it's an incremental improvement in that we improvement aspects as we move along, but there's no question I don't think that the recreational catch estimates we're getting today are much better than the ones we were getting ten years ago or even five or six years ago.

(Mark): I hope to agree with you on that. I must say the ones that we got when the red grouper closure came in Florida, the estimate was when we had a season of four hurricanes blow through the Gulf Coast and gas at \$4 a gallon that the recreational effort had increased that year by 200% or so, which was absolutely ridiculous.

But I will let you go on, I thank you for the hard work that you do, this is not an easy job whatsoever, the management of these fisheries and our wildlife conservation efforts. But I can imagine it's as frustrating on your side as it is on some of us on the recreational and even the charter boat and commercial sides as well. But please do the best that you can and know that the interest from us is there watching you.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: All right well, thank you and we'll keep trying.

(Mark): Thank you very much Mr. Crabtree.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Tim), your line is open.

(Timothy): Okay, hey Dr. Crabtree, (Timothy) Mobile, Alabama. I've been looking at, you know, all the comments and everything, and I think one of the - earlier you had hit on when you were talking to (Tom), you had hit on, you know, the fact that, you know, every proposal that, you know, that you all put out there to discuss and everything, you get a lot of push back on.

And, (not only) (Tom Hilton) but several others, you know, had mentioned, you know, that you might get more buy in, you know, with things such as like better data collection and stuff, and I certainly concur with all those. But one thing that I wanted to, you know, to kind of to get your feelings about was, you know, as a recreational fisherman, one of the things that I would like to see, along with, you know, every other recreational fisherman, is just more access.

You know, if you said we have a 27 day season, you know, based on the best data available, that's fine. You know, but, you know, me and I would (think), you know, most other recreational fisherman, you know, I work during the week. You know, so now, you know, this year we're going to be able to fish from June 1 to June 27, unless your, you know, one of the states that (went noncompliant) is different, but.

You know, so, you know, take last year, you know, the month of June, you know, somebody hit on that, you know, like they were talking about, you know, takes a bit even over here, you know, in Mobile down to the, you know, southwest Panhandle, you know, it was miserably rough and so we lost three quarters of the season due to rough weather.

We couldn't fish, I mean even - so even, you know, during the week, I mean, I had to work, you know, we had weekend, you know, it was unfishable. And I know you all extended it for a week but it was still rough, it was still hard to get out and, you know, and I've seen it proposed numerous times, you know, you know, from an access standpoint, can't you all say okay, you know, we're going to give 27 days or 35 days or however many days we're going to give, but and for the private recreational we're going to make it weekend only.

You know, and that way instead of just having, you know, 27 days where like in a derby style, trying to catch as many fish as we can and get out as many times as we can weather permitting, taking off work, you know, other things. Why can't you say okay we're going to give you, you know, so many days and we're going to spread this over, you know, three months for weekends only?

And then why hasn't something like that been, you know, you talk about pilot programs and this and that, why hasn't something like that been proposed for the, you know, for the recreational side? To give us more, you know, greater access through the summer months.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well having a weekends only fishery has been proposed and looked at and in fact, if you recall the year of the oil spill when we had that, you know, so many places where it closed, we (actually) reopened the fishery on I think for the first, and had a weekend fishery for a while and some people liked it and some people didn't.

And we've had discussions at the council about having a weekend fishery. Now a couple of points to that, if you have weekends only fisheries then you have a shorter number of days, because generally effort on the weekends is a third again higher or so than it is on weekdays. So if you had the same number

of days on weekends as opposed to consecutive days you end up with more effort.

Now, you know, I was one of the ones who when I saw a 27, 28 day season, my response to that was no way, that's too short, we've got to do something to have more days. So I supported lowering the bag limit from two fish to one fish, and that would have gotten us to a 44 day season.

But the council didn't agree with me, and voted to stay at two fish. But what, you know, and it's always a balance between season length and bag limit, but what I keep hearing from fisherman is they need access and they need days. So it seems like to me we were better off to lower the bag limit, but I guess other people, you know, obviously people have different opinions about that.

But we could go to a weekend season like that, but you'd probably end up with overall the number of days being reduced. But when we've talked about it in the past, the council in the end has decided to stay with the consecutive days that we've been on. But, I would be, if the council wanted to do that, they certainly could.

Coordinator: And our next question comes from (Don), your line is open.

(Don): Hi, I'm a captain on a private recreational boat in south Texas, you've addressed my question, it was around what regional management - what were the initial thoughts on what factors would go into regional allocation. And I would think that it would have mostly to do with fish stock in that area, but you've talked a little bit about that, but could you share a little more?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well I think there's a couple of ways you could come at the regional allocation. One would be to try and base it on the fish population, but that would have to be on a rather broad scale.

The stock assessment gives us an eastern gulf estimate and a western gulf estimate, so you could come up with a catch level for the western gulf and one for the eastern gulf. And if you just wanted to have two regions that way you could base it on that. If you want to go though to a state-by-state breakdown, then you've got to come up with some other way to divide things up more finely. And typically when we've done that in the past, we've used some combination of what landings have been over the years.

And then, you know, with regional management at least the way I look at it, part of the issue there is the states have to make a commitment that they're going to try and constrain the catch by opening and closing state waters. So that would mean in regional management in the sense of us delegating the season to the states that would mean for Texas they would need to be willing to close Texas state waters down for a good chunk of the year in order to constrain the catch.

But at any rate that's typically the two ways that I can think of that the allocation could be addressed, but the council really hasn't gotten far enough down the path with this to decide anything on it. But I would point out that if we're going to move to regional management in time for the 2014 season, they're going to need to start making some decisions about these things pretty quickly.

(Don): Thank you.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Brian), your line is open.

(Brian): Hello, Dr. Crabtree. I appreciate your time and all the efforts that you guys have done on this job.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Thank you.

(Brian): I think mostly my - there's a lot of stuff that's already been answered through the teleconference already and I appreciate some of the comments and very educated responses from not only the staff as well as the callers in but my statement really is from the standpoint of I received the notification that the head boats will do some of the surveying through the year in 2014. Has there been any investigation of recreational fishermen using smartphones to be able to do the same sort of thing on a limited number of months or parts of the year to get more data quicker to you?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes, there's been a lot of discussion about that and one of things, you know, one of the problems with the survey we have now is that it's not as timely as we need. And so for example with Red Snapper, the season opens and closes before we get any in season information on what's been caught. So, there's been discussion about whether we could use some select panels or groups of recreational fishermen who are willing to use their phones, smartphones or whatever to report their catches with us over some creative time say a week or something like that.

To give us something that could give some indication whether the catch rates were about what they thought they were going to be or are they higher, are they lower and give us a way to make some judgment during the season as to whether we're catching more fish or less fish than we think, that we can make some adjustment. And I think if you selected the fishermen properly, and got a good geographic balance and if those fishermen would really do it and be

accurate in it, I think there's a lot of potential for that to enhance the current survey and improve our ability to time the opening and closing of these fisheries, so, that's something we are talking about and looking at.

Coordinator: And our last question comes from (Jim), your line is open.

(Jim): Yes, (Jim).

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Hey, (Jim)?

(Jim): Hey. I'm sure you're familiar with the Bonner Sutherland Bill that's recently been introduced.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes, I am.

(Jim): If that were to pass in Alabama and Florida, where it will extend their boundaries out to 120 feet and probably like soon after that the western gulf states would put pressure on their congressman to join in and they may even amend or have an amendment to the bill but anyway, what kind of effect would that have on the recreational season?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well, my understanding with that bill is it would extend everyone's state waters out to 20 fathoms and if you look at the Gulf, that's a pretty variable distance to get out to 20 fathoms depending where you are. It's a long ways offshore in some areas and not very far off shores in others and I think that bill would extended out to 20 fathoms, but no less than nine miles. So it would affect all of the states.

I think it would make it difficult for us to have much control over the recreational catches and pretty much put controlling recreational catches in the

hands of the states for a lot of these species that are, you know, that are abundant in those depths, and certainly there's a lot of Red Snapper inside 20 fathoms. So I think what would happen and how successful would be would really then hinge on how good a job the states did in constraining the catches.

(Jim): But wouldn't that effect the federal season? I mean you would take that in account like you do it now where the ones that are going noncompliant, you would take that into account before we ever set the recreational season.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Yes, it would have great effect on what the recreational season and the rest of the federal waters would be.

(Jim): Okay, just quickly, going back to my first question. I just want to make sure that disclosure in the federal waters is for recreational only.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well, for this season, (Jim), all we have are shortened seasons for recreational fisheries and we've had those in the past. They're shorter this year and they're different off the different states. But, for this season right now there's nothing going on that changes the (unintelligible) fishery. Now, where we end up next year and what would happen if legislation passes, well that'll just depend on the specifics of what happens. But for right now and for this year, no, I don't see an impact on the commercial fishermen.

(Jim): Okay, thank you.

Coordinator: Our next question comes from (Thomas), your line is open.

(Thomas): Yes, there was an interesting point made there talking about this 20 fathom distance out here. You know we've - Texas allowing people to fish year around for Snapper within 9 miles, well then you're looking at 10 fathoms

there. You go out 60 feet and the volume of Snapper is very, very limited compared to all of the other states that are within a 9 mile range, you know, they can be in very, very deep water and there will be a lot of Snapper there. But Texas seems to be bit of size greatly as a result of having this kind of limits providing the fishing time. You respond to that?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well, I mean, it definitely varies a lot from state to state in terms of how much access you have to Red Snapper. And that's just because of their regular nature of the depth contours in the Gulf and, you know, I'm not trying to criticize any state, they're all making their own management decisions and things. And I'm sure they're doing it on a good faith basis and doing what they think right, but the decisions the state makes about their state water season has impacts on how much fishing's going to take place and how many fish are caught.

And so when we determine how long the federal season can be, we have to look at what's going on in those state waters and when we have situations where state waters are open and federal waters are closed, it does create a lot of confusion and it does create compliance issues and those kinds of things that can create problems that we have to work through. So I'm not trying to be critical of anyone or offer judgment on the other states, it's just that we've got a lot of problems caused now by this combination of seasons and things that we have and I think it is having, as you point out, some inequitable impacts on fishermen depending on where they happen to live. And I just think they're - we need to find a better way to do business if we can.

(Thomas): Yes, well the recreational fishermen in the Texas area, you know, they - it's very costly because you're going to have to run out 15, 20 miles just to get some decent fishing in and that's not the same as going out of Louisiana and

Florida and some of the other states that have a very close proximities to deeper water and access to more Snapper.

So, I think that all of the information that I've seen it seems to be critical about Texas running the state fishery and I think that it's like you're saying it's kind of inequitable for us to be judged in that matter. I have another question and I guess I may have missed some of it or don't - am not - I was wondering are they determining the catch totals by the number of fish or by the pounds?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well, they - we get a count of how many fish were caught. So we get a number and then we get an average weight of the fish and all the various areas that comes from the dockside interviews where they measure the fish and weigh some of them. And so then to get from numbers to pounds we just take the numbers caught in all the areas and multiply it times the average weights in those areas and convert it into pounds.

Coordinator: And our next question comes from (Pam), your line is open.

(Pam): Yes, good morning, Dr. Crabtree. I wanted to ask you a question. There are so many divisive issues between the commercial and recreational sectors. Has it ever been considered to have the commercial sectors allocation of the ACL each year, have them totally responsible for theirs and their accountability measures?

Some of them just the commercial sector if there are issues in other fishing there. I know that sounds, you know, like I'm trying to hurt our side of it but what really once - we're now working on getting much better data on the rex tester.

And we know that there are lots - fewer anglers out there than what data we've seen so that is going to change hopefully very soon. So that's what seems to be fishing may not be that much of the fishing so what's the real numbers are in and I think it will cause a lot less division between confrontation between the - you know if we could manage something like that. Is that a possibility?

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Well, I think we can separate the accountability measures for the commercial and recreational sectors to some extent and I think we have done that. Now, I don't believe and I believe the new assessment will confirm this. There hasn't been any over fishing going on with Red Snapper for the last few years.

We have had some overruns of the quotas on the recreational side but they haven't been large enough to create an over fishing situation and so the quotas have continued to go up each year. They haven't gone up as much as they would had the overruns not occurred, and they're probably ways you could separate the impacts of that a little further between the two sectors but the more you try to do that I think the more complicated it gets.

But, I don't think there's anything precluding the council from trying to look at that kind of thing. I'm not sure if that really answered your question or not but I hope it did.

(Pam): Well, it did somewhat. I just honestly a lot of things did not get accomplished and it's partly in part because of the confrontation that arise between the commercial and rec sectors. If we could begin working towards some of those issues, that cause such confrontational issues, I think that more could be accomplished in the long run.

But if the - you know, as far as the overfishing what I'm saying, I was referring to and I should have not said overfishing, but it is a over (long allocation), I truly believe that we are not going over our quotas on the west side because I see the number of people who are out there and I know that it is much fewer than there used to be. And there are reasons for that, you know, fuel prices as well as the economy and fishing regulations.

The combination of those three have greatly reduced the number of people in the water. So I do see that once we get the recreational data corrected, I believe that we're going to show that there were not overruns on the rec side. Some thought there were.

Dr. Roy Crabtree: Okay, well thanks, (Pam).

Allison Garrett: All right, well it's after 1 o'clock. I wanted to - we're going to wrap up now - wrap up the teleconference. We wanted to sincerely thank everyone for joining this conversation and remind you that the invitation that was sent to you, there's some links below and one of those is to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's Website.

That meeting is April 15 - 18 in Gulf Port, Mississippi. And you can join - if you can't join in person, there is a link that you can join and through the Website, so please take a look at that. There's also some information about Red Snapper there. I wanted to thank our operator, (Trier) for helping us get through this and get everybody in the queue.

If you have any further questions, or if you would like to provide us with some feedback if you liked this teleconference format and would like to do this again, please feel free to submit any further questions or commits and

feedback to me Allison Garrett. You'll see my email on the invitation that you received. Thank you to everyone for joining us and have a great afternoon.

Coordinator: This does conclude today's conference. Thank you for participating. You may disconnect at this time.

END