**2014 Public Comment Summary**

**Statewide Items - Coastal Fisheries**

**As of 01/21/14**

**Items**

 - Increasing flounder populations through possible implementation/extension of management measures such as extension of seasonal closures to gigging plus reducing bag limits during the closures.

 -Improving the quality of spotted seatrout fishing, either regionally or coastwide, through possible implementation of a 5-fish bag limit, as is currently standard in the lower Laguna Madre.

 - Temporary closure of public oyster reefs in East Galveston Bay and Half Moon Reef in Matagorda Bay

**Scoping Meetings for Flounder and Spotted Seatrout**

The Coastal Fisheries Division held 7 scoping meetings between January 7 – 9:

Port Lavaca - 78 attendees – No verbal comments received in support of any regulations, yet several were received in writing. Opposition heard in regard to changes in the flounder regulations with primary concern being adverse economic impacts to local economies (e.g. boat builders, hotels, etc.) and that current regulations are achieving the stated goals. Clarification sought on why changes are needed in trout regulations when the science doesn’t indicate there is a problem.

San Antonio - 16 attendees - Numerous questions seeking clarification as to why we were proposing rules. No one came out in opposition to any proposal. One commenter recommended that if the 5 fish bag limit for trout is expanded, the possession limit should remain at twice the daily bag. Three comments received supportive of expanding the 5 fish limit for trout coastwide. Three written comments received supportive of the flounder proposals.

Rockport - 86 attendees - Varying opinions, but general consensus was to adopt the 5 fish bag limit for trout coastwide, and shift the flounder regulations from Nov. 15 - Dec.15

Corpus Christi - 77 attendees - including a representative from Todd Hunter's office (did not speak or provide comment) and Channel 6 news - While there was some opposition, attendees were generally supportive of a 5 fish trout limit coastwide. Flounder responses were split 50/50, with one person recommending expansion of the reduced bag into December, and allow gigging in December.

Dickinson – 160 attendees- The overwhelming majority of folks in attendance did not want any changes implemented on bag limits (trout) and seasonal closures (flounder), however, many did recommend reducing minimum size limits for both trout and flounder and liberalizing red drum bag limits.

Port Arthur – 54 attendees – Overall, the participants favored current bag limits or returning to past bag limits, and recommended enforcement of current regulations. One comment not heard before was to eliminate the Texas/Louisiana reciprocal agreement to stop LA anglers from launching in LA, fishing in TX waters, then land LA limits in LA (though it is illegal for anglers to be in possession of fish that exceed Texas bag limits while fishing in Texas waters). Although prompted, no attendee left written comments.

Port Isabel – 16 attendees - Crowd supportive of additional management measures for flounder, generally supportive of a December gigging ban with a two fish bag. Handed in comments included: designating flounder as a gamefish, eliminate commercial gigging with compensation for lost wages, extend ban from last two weeks of October through December, reduce bag limits from October through December. No opposition to extending flounder management measures pronounced. Crowd supportive of extending five fish bag for spotted seatrout coastwide.

**Online Comment for Flounder and Spotted Seatrout**

We received 1,131 online comments regarding flounder:

 57% agree with proposal(s)

 43% disagree with proposal(s)

To date we have received 1,227 online comments regarding spotted seatrout:

 60% agree with proposal(s)

 40% disagree with proposal(s)

**Email Comments for Flounder and Spotted Seatrout**

Approximately 170 emails have been received, majority pertaining to trout. A quick summary shows approximately 100 emails supportive of lowering the bag limit of trout to 5 either coastwide or regionally. Forty-three emails are for maintaining the status quo. In regard to flounder, 27 emails have been received supporting expansion of the regulations and 26 against.

**Online Survey for Flounder and Spotted Seatrout**

We have contracted with TAMU to conduct a survey of 10,000 saltwater anglers regarding these issues. We received 1,672 responses.

The majority of respondents supported status quo for both flounder (52%) and trout (55%).

The second most commonly supported option for flounder was to expand the November regulations into the first week of December (47%), followed by the first two weeks of December (42%), and the last week of October (30%). The least supported options were the last two weeks of October (27%) and the entire month of December (27%).

In regard to preferred options for trout, the second most commonly supported option was to expand the 5-fish bag coastwide (49%), followed by expansion through Matagorda Bay (35%).

When looking at results by which bay system anglers fish most often, the lower and middle coast was general more supportive for expansion of both flounder and trout regulations, while the upper coast was in more opposition.

**Coastal Bend Guides Association**

Supports status quo but will support whatever TPWD decides

**Coastal Resource Advisory Committee Endorsement**

Unanimously endorsed additional measures for flounder

Unanimously endorsed 5-fish limit for trout with a 5-year sunset date

**Scoping Meetings for Oyster Closures – Jan 14, 15**

Port Lavaca – 63 attendees - There was no voiced or written opposition to the proposals. Approximately 7 spoke in support of the closure. One person voiced concern about boats moving to other areas of Galveston Bay and that it would be better to close the entire bay. Approximately 14 individuals raised their hand in response to a question from this individual asking who supported the closing all of Galveston Bay to allow oysters to better recover.

Topics not specifically related to proposals:

* Daily sack limit should be reduced to 25/day; will help keep boats from moving up and down the coast
* Enhance penalty for undersize oysters such that everyone on the boat gets ticketed as well as any dealer who buys undersize oysters

Dickinson Marine Lab – 32 - attendees

Tracy Woody-

* Has 800 acres of Oyster Leases and ¾ are in East Bay. This would benefit his Leases due to lack of Poaching.
* Oysters are currently full of Dermo and will not survive a 2 year closure
* No Oysters in Other areas
* Alternative Proposal to
* Bouy off reefs, and close only restoration areas
* Check status on reefs during the 1st February of the second year (February 2016) and if 60% are of market size. Open the area.
* Use it as a test to Open and Close the area
* The Audience called on itself on who agreed with Tracy 7 of 32 spoke up in support
* 10-12k tons of substrate for their reefs

Mark Valentino-

* Oysters in East Bay will not make it past two seasons (dermo)
* How many of the grants funding the project requires measurement of success?
* 10-12k tons of substrate for their reefs

Tracy Woody – topics not specifically related to proposals

* Roll Over Pass should never of been open
* Hopes lawsuit is not successful and Roll Over is closed
* FW input is good
* Oyster Kill in East bay would be Great and would kill parasites

**Emails**

One in support of closing only restoration areas.

One in support of the 2-year proposal to close the approved area of East Bay and goes further by asking that we reduce the width of a legal dredge from 48-inches to 36-inches and reduce the daily sack limit from 50 sacks/day to 30 sacks/day. He also recommends creating a mechanism whereby commercial oyster boat license holders could renew their license at a reduced rate if they did not want to fish for the 2-year closure period.