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CHAPTERS

Ship Island
Pine Belt
Horn Island
Central Mississippi
Bay
Biloxi Bay
Golden Triangle



Coastal Conservation Association/Mississippi

TO: Commission on Marine Resources (CMR)

FROM: Coastal Conservation Association Mississippi

DATE: May 18, 2010

RE: Statement on Spotted Seatrout

Coastal Conservation Association Mississippi recognizes that the premier sport fishing species in state waters, spotted seatrout (speckled trout), is highly valued by seafood markets and the restaurant industry. We have long held that the markets and restaurants can and should be supplied by a viable hook-and-line commercial fishery. It is with this background that CCA has never sought gamefish status for spotted seatrout even with other states having this provision.

We would point out that over an 18 year period (1991 thru 2008) the average annual value of spotted seatrout landed in Mississippi was \$74,118. While this is a significant amount, it is surely dwarfed by the value to the citizens of the state reflected in expenditures of recreational anglers targeting the species. We will also note that an average of 68 commercial hook-and-line licenses was sold during that same 18 year period yielding an average revenue of \$1,089 per fisher from spotted seatrout sales. During the license years 1991 through 2005 (15 years), an average of 68 Mississippi commercial hook-and-line licenses were sold annually. During the five years from 2005 through 2010, licenses sold increased from 22 to 195, or an 880% increase.

CCA Mississippi is also well aware that over the years an unknown number of so-called "recreational anglers" have sold their catch of spotted seatrout to offset their trip expense or simply to supplement their income. This practice is blatantly illegal and totally discredited by CCA. We contend it is simply wrong for these "recreational" anglers to compete unfairly with the true commercial fisherman who depends on his catch for his livelihood. Our long-held position is that these are NOT recreational anglers, but simply unlicensed commercial fishers.

Dedicated to the Conservation and Protection of Marine Life

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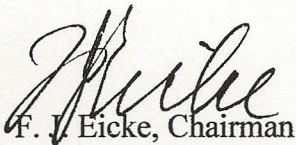
Statement on Spotted Seatrout, CCA Mississippi, May 18, 2010

Anecdotal evidence suggests that more large trout were caught this winter than any time in recent history. We firmly believe that the size limits that had been in place over the past 15 years contributed to this phenomenon, if verified. Last year the size limit for recreationally-caught trout was reduced from 14 to 13 inches. CCA is opposed to any increase in the annual commercial quota for spotted seatrout until data reflecting this size reduction has been thoroughly analyzed for impact on the stock.

However, because the recent early closure of commercial spotted seatrout harvest has prompted this commission to study the matter, we believe it may be time to take a proactive and in-depth look at the fishery. CMR guidelines allow for appointment of an advisory council that, in this case, might be called the "spotted seatrout task force." This group should include interested sectors and fully recognize the primacy of interest of recreational anglers in this fishery. The group would be tasked with developing a comprehensive management plan for the species. We believe the "spotted seatrout task force" should consider the points below (and others as needed) as part of that plan:

- Establishing a target Spawning Potential Ratio for Mississippi's spotted seatrout stock;
- Beginning and ending dates of the commercial quota year;
- Poundage of commercial landings allowed per quota year;
- Minimum and maximum size of commercial trout landed (and consideration of maximum size limits on spotted seatrout in the recreational regulations as well) if deemed beneficial to sustaining the resource;
- A means test for purchase of a commercial hook-and-line license;
- Clear accountability guidelines by purchasers of commercial catch of spotted seatrout to assure that catch is reflected in data gathered by DMR;
- Securing a commitment by marine enforcement to apprehend and prosecute anyone illegally selling (or purchasing) spotted seatrout.

CCA stands ready to cooperate with the Commission and Department in considering this important matter.



F. J. Eicke, Chairman

Government Relations Committee