MINUTES OF MEETING OF SOUTH CAROLINA WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMISSION

IN BEAUFORT NOVEMBER 28 , 1952

The meeting was convened in the County Court House at 11 o'clock with Vice-Chairman Johnson presiding in the absence of Chairman Warren. All other members were present except Mr. McKeithan. Also present were Dr. Robert Lunz and Alonzo Seabrook.

Mr. Johnson opened the meeting by stating that the Commission was governed by the laws of the state and must instruct its inspectors to enforce the laws. He added that the meeting was being held solely for the purpose of allowing the commercial fishing interests to present their views regarding existing legislation and their ideas on needed legislation.

Mr. Calhoun Thomas, who represents several commercial fishing companies, said that his clients were primarily interested in oysters and introduced General Arnold, executive manager of three of the companies he represented.

Senator E. B. Rodgers said that several of the smaller oyster men had asked him to present their problem. He pointed out that they leased small areas and cultivated oysters and, under the state law, any citizen can remove two bushels. He said that due to good roads and more travel the small leases are being depleted. He suggested the cultivating of some public areas so oysters could be removed without depleting the private leases.

Stanley Lawson of the Palmetto Seafood Company declared that the shrimping business had "gone to pot" and undue restrictions were about to put operators out of business. He declared that the shrimpers were interested in conservation but that the present regulations had been set up without study and without consideration of the business. He suggested that the Commission draw up a set of laws that would work, adding that the shrimpers did not want to be law-breakers but were being forced into it as a matter of self-preservation.

Mr. Lawson said he operated seven boats but was unable to control all his operators. He added that one of his boats was now laid up because it had lost its license.

Senator Rodgers declared the inside fishing law was ridiculous and also denied that the trout fishing was hurt by shrimping operations. He presented a map of Beaufort county that he said represented the ideas of the shrimpers on what inshore areas could be opened to shrimping.

Dr. Lunz was asked to study this map with Mr. Lawson and John J. Harter, another spokesman for the shrimpers, Mr. Anderson of the Commercial Fisheries Branch of the Fish and Wildlife Service was also invited to confer with them.

While they were out studying the map Senator Rodgers discussed several matters. He said that St. Helena Sound and other inshore waters should be opened to crabbing at certain times and asked that the Commission recommend to the Legislature that it hire Dr. Lunz and give him sufficient funds to learn all the necessary facts about shrimp, oysters and crabs and their harvesting. He also suggested that a stop be put to "heading" shrimp on the shrimping grounds.

Rep. Ben Carter stated that he realized the inspectors must enforce the laws but said the present laws should be revised and a program of research developed. He recommended that a specific tax be levied on seafood with the proceeds used for research and a study of seafood problems. He added that when there were so many violations there must be something wrong with the law.

He said that there were certain times when trawling in open sounds should be allowed.

The matter of trawling for crabs with 5-inch mesh nets inshore during the winter months was brought up and Mr. Carter said this would help the shrimpers make money during the slack months.

(It is my understanding that under a resolution by the old Board of Fisheries this has been allowed recently but the force of the resolution expires with 1952.)

In conclusion, Mr. Carter recommended that the Commission consider the possibility of recommending to the Legislature that the sounds be opened during January, February and March for trawling for crabs with a 5-inch mesh net and also that certain areas be opened to shrimping at certain times.

Sidney Smith, Beaufort Township magistrate, declared that the present shrimping limits are confusing. He also said that he had set, as far as his cases were concerned, the present line of buoys in St. Helena Sound as the limit to avoid confusion. He also declared that the shrimpers do not respect the laws because they consider them unjust and unfairly administered.

Mr. Harter then presented the recommendations of the shrimpers.

He said that he, like most of the other shrimpers, had broken the law out of necessity and that it was impossible to make a living shrimping outside.

He suggested a percentage basis on roe shrimp and a closed season in June--or whatever months there might be the heaviest spawning. He said the habits of shrimp vary and flexible regulations were needed to agree with what the shrimp were doing.

He discussed the sizes of shrimp at various times and said that by mid-August when the shrimp count comes to legal size the shrimp suddenly disappear from the sound areas and do not stay in the beach area where they could be caught.

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He agreed with the others for more money for the Lunz study but said the shrimpers needed some type of legislation to protect their investment until the study was completed. He suggested the shrimpers be allowed to work the sanctuaries until the study is completed.

He then showed the recommended lines on the map where the shrimpers would be allowed to operate. Some of the inshore areas would be opened permanently and others temporarily at the recommendation of Dr. Lunz.

It was agreed that the shrimpers draw up a list of their recommendations and give them to the Commission and also that the Commission consider the question of allowing crabbing with 5-inch mesh nets during December, if it has the right, as well as recommending legislation allowing this during January and February, and possibly March.

Dr. Lunz said that he would make his recommendations to the Commission on this matter as soon as possible.

(You have probably received Dr. Lunz' letter by now.)

Eddie Finlay