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The Organization Of "Alabama Landings"

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"ALABAMA LANDINGS" is a monthly report of the landings of seafoods and some fresh water fishes, as compiled from voluntary reports made by the dealers of fish and fishery products. The figures are collected and compiled by the Alabama Marine Laboratory, a unit of the Seafoods Section of the Department of Conservation—Division of Game, Fish and Seafoods. Through a cooperative agreement, the figures are published by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Dealers in shrimp and oysters have been required to report their landings and pay a tax on those landings since, at least, 1926. With only a few exceptions, these records have been published on a fiscal year basis in the annual reports, or the preceeding quadrennial reports of the Department of Conservation.

Dealers in fish and crabs have apparently never been required to make such reports. Some of the dealers in Mobile and Bayou la Batre report daily to the Market News Service in New Orleans. Most dealers have been contacted periodically by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service Statistical Section and annual production estimates have been made. However, with "Alabama Landings" the first effort has been made to get landing reports on all seafoods brought into the ports of Alabama on a monthly or seasonal basis.

Of the laws of the Alabama Department of Conservation there are two that affect the gathering of statistics for non-tax purposes. One of these laws, passed in 1939, requires that the catchers of shrimp and oysters make weekly reports. The fishermen are required to report the amount taken and the dealer to which those products are sold. The dealers are also required to make weekly reports that cover the amount bought from individual fishermen. An attempt was made to enforce this law in 1948-49. Law enforcement personnel handled the gathering and compilation of the figures. The large amount of work required was not justified by the returns and the enforcement of this law was abandoned.

A second law requires that once each quarter, on definite dates, the wholesale salt-water fish dealers report the weight of each species of fish purchased during the previous three months from commercial fishermen. This law, passed in 1943, requires the Department to furnish forms for these reports. As far as can be determined, the forms have never been furnished and the law never enforced.

The enforcement of either of the preceeding laws has not been considered in the present gathering of statistics. If laws are needed to get the proper reports from the dealers both of the laws mentioned should be repealed and a single one covering all dealers in seafoods be passed. For the present, however, figures are being collected on a purely voluntary basis.

In February of this year, a few of the larger dealers were contacted to get

their opinion of a fisheries products report. None of those visited were anxious to make a report, but could see the value of properly collected statistics and would make a report if requested. Open opposition was expressed by two relatively large dealers whose cooperation was needed if the report was to be of value. Their opposition was to making out another report. They were already reporting oyster and shrimp landings to the Department, daily seafood landings to the U.S. Market News Service, gross tonnage reports to the U.S. Engineers, freezing reports to some other government agency, and as they expressed it "just too many reports." Believing that the dealers were justified in their objections, the project was not developed at that time.

In April of this year, Mr. Bert E. Thomas, then Director of the Department of Conservation, requested the Alabama Marine Laboratory to prepare forms for a monthly products report and to undertake the collection of fisheries statistics. At the time he also requested the Game and Fish Section to do the same for the fresh-water fisheries. When the Marine Laboratory forms were ready for printing, it was discovered that the Game and Fish Section had abandoned the idea of gathering statistics. Because no licenses are required to handle fresh-water fish there was no way of locating the dealers involved. Also, with widely scattered dealers, the cost of supervision needed to get reasonably accurate reports would exceed the value of the report. Therefore, because many of the dealers, particularly in Mobile, handle both salt-water fishes and fresh-water fishes, the names of five fish commonly caught commercially in fresh water were added to the form prepared by the Marine Laboratory. It was realized that the freshwater landings would be incomplete, but a partial report was considered better than no report at all.

The forms were printed and bound into booklets. Each booklet contains twenty-four pages, alternately white and yellow. The white sheets are to be forwarded monthly to the Marine Laboratory and the yellow sheets are to be retained by the dealer as his record. The forms are as simple as possible. Each species of fish or seafood commonly landed in the state is listed. Poundage can be reported in one of two columns. One column is for the catch in "Inside Waters," that is the catch in any bay, sound or river in the State. The other column is for "Outside Waters," which refers to the Gulf of Mexico. No reference to gear is made. At present only the poundage of fish taken each month is collected.

Two blanks, one for the month the report covers and another for the date of filing, are the only other spaces to be filled in. There is no place for the firm or dealer's name. Instead, each book is numbered and a record of the book provided each firm is kept in code at the Laboratory. This was done to reduce any potential opposition to the report by those that believe it can be used to enforce the collection of taxes. All dealers have been assured that the information is confidential. Individual reports are not to be revealed to competitors or law enforcement authorities. The reports are to be published only when three or more dealers' figures can be added together. For example, the amount of oysters used for canning will not be published separately from oysters used for raw stock because only two factories do the canning.

Books were distributed in late August and early September, either by personal contact or by mail. These books went to licensed wholesale salt-water fish dealers, seafood shippers, seafood processors, live bait dealers and a few known unlicensed dealers in fresh-water fishes. Some books went to dealers who have no source of production but buy from other dealers, some licensed firms that

are now out of business, and some duplicate books went to firms doing business under two names. Corrections have been made for these. Additions are made to the list of cooperators when new firms are licensed, when it is discovered that a retail dealer has a source of production, or when a fresh-water fish dealer's name comes to light, usually at the suggestion of another dealer. After the books were distributed, the next thing was to get the reports.

The larger firms were visited first. The values to be derived from a fisheries products report were explained. The possibility of using the figures to help prevent unfair legislation has earned a number of active cooperators. In almost all cases it has taken personal contact to get the first, and sometimes the second, report. Live-bait dealers and retail fish dealers with private production sources are now being contacted.

Each firm has been met as an individual and gets individual treatment. Most dealers make the reports on the established form and in the manner intended. However, two large dealers have made arrangements to report the same figures they give the Market News Service. Some others have requested their report be taken from tax records, and where the dealer handles only oysters and shrimp, this has been done. Rather than take the time to make out the report there are dealers who would rather have the biologist compile it from a purchase book. This, too, has been done.

Of the 132 dealers who now have books, seventy-five have made voluntary reports in at least one of the last three months. The landings of a few others have been taken from the tax records. At present, those that have made no report are usually live-bait dealers or retail dealers with private sources of production. Some of the live-bait dealers, incidentally, hold their licenses merely as a means of evading the commercial shrimp laws. Of the larger wholesale fish dealers who buy from fishermen, only one has refused to submit at least one voluntary report. In his case, estimates have been made. These are based on his approximate catch in comparison to his competitors.

To facilitate the collection and compiling of the reports, cards have been prepared for each dealer. On this card is the name of the firm, address, phone number, person responsible for the report, the code number of the book provided, what licenses have been purchased, what products are produced, and notes on the response to the report. Notes on fishermen employed and the gear they use are being added to these cards.

For ease in compiling, all records are divided into eight areas of production. When sufficient reports have been collected for each area, the dealer list is checked for those that made a report. If a voluntary report was not made, the tax records are checked and a report for the dealer prepared from that source. If a report or tax record is not available for the month, an estimate of probable landings is made. This estimate is based on a knowledge of the number of fishermen employed, past records of production, and general fishing conditions. Where tax records or estimates are used, notes to that effect are made on the forms. No estimates have been made for the landings of live-bait dealers or dealers in fresh-water fishes.

After a products report has been prepared for every dealer, other than those just mentioned, they are tabulated by areas as previously stated. These tabulations are in turn compiled to make landing reports for three separate regions, namely Mobile County, Baldwin County, and the Alabama-Tombigbee River watershed. These final figures are forwarded to the Fish and Wildlife Service

in Washington for publication. The first printed report was for the month of September, 1950.

Because it is necessary to observe certain deadlines if the reports are to be issued with any regularity, estimates are made for some dealers who will eventually report. Therefore, "Alabama Landings" as first published should be considered a tentative report and subject to correction. When a report is received from a dealer after the tabulations are complete, that report is filed along with all other reports for the same month. It is planned that one year from the month of the report a corrected report will be made. This will be done by replacing the tax records and estimates by original reports from the dealer wherever this is possible.

Although the Alabama Marine Laboratory is still a one-man staffed organization, the development of this report has not been a one man job. Acknowledgments are due Bert E. Thomas for providing the stimulus in getting the report started, C. H. Lyles for personal assistance and aid in the first months of operation, A. W. Anderson, E. A. Power and others of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service for additional guidance and assistance, Nellie P. Landry of the Department's Seafood Office for aid in contacting the licensed dealers, Jean E. Lueth for general assistance in handling the reports as they are returned from the dealers, and the numerous dealers who have made this a truly cooperative venture.

The Organization Of The Florida Marine Fisheries Statistical System

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FISHERIES BIOLOGISTS and economists have for many years realized the value of maintaining accurate records of fish production. Classical examples of research work in fisheries such as the Pacific Halibut investigation, the Fraser River Sockeye Salmon and the California Sardine program were all initiated by a full scale collection of the past and present statistics of the particular fishery being studied.

As has been pointed out by many workers, fisheries statistics are not easy to obtain. The difficulty of collection, together with the expense involved, has led to the neglect of this vital information in many of the fishery areas of the world. The Gulf area (with Florida in particular) is no exception.

Why must we not neglect our collection of these figures? In other words, to what use can the fisheries scientist and the economist put these catch statistics?

To the fisheries biologist they show, (1) the changes in abundance of the important commercial species by area. That is, changes in the numbers of fish caught can be noted and protective measures introduced to maintain the supply of fish for future years. In this respect it might be well to mention that many declines are of a temporary nature and an analysis of catches will indicate that the imposition of restrictive fishing measures is unnecessary. (2) Statistics permit the calculation of the availability of the fish to the fisherman, or, in other words, show the ease with which he can make his catch. This will often provide a truer picture of the stocks of fish available than does the total poundage