

132<sup>nd</sup> Caribbean Fishery Management Council Regular Meeting  
September 1-2, 2009  
Aguadilla, PR

**STATEMENT FROM DELEGATE DONNA CHRISTENSEN**

I WANT TO REITERATE MY SUPPORT FOR THE FISHERMEN AND WOMEN OF ST. THOMAS, ST. CROIX, AND ST. JOHN OF THE US VIRGIN ISLANDS. AS A MEMBER OF CONGRESS AND A SENIOR MEMBER OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS AND WILDLIFE, OCEANS AND FISHERIES OF THE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES I AM EQUALLY SUPPORTIVE OF SUSTAINABLE FISHING AND THE PROTECTION OF OUR RESOURCES, INCLUDING OCEANS AND FISHERIES.

THAT SUPPORT AND INTEREST HAS BEEN EXHIBITED BY MY STAFF OR MY ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION AT EVERY MEETING OF THE COUNCIL SINCE I HAVE BEEN IN CONGRESS.

ALTHOUGH I WAS UNABLE TO ATTEND THE RECENT SCOPING MEETINGS IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS, I DID TAKE THE TIME TO MEET WITH TODD GEDAMKE, JOE KIMMEL, AND BILL ARNOLD OF THE *SEFSC* AND THE ST. THOMAS FISHERMENS ASSOCIATION IN ADVANCE OF THOSE MEETINGS.

WE HAD WHAT I CONSIDER A FRANK AND OPEN DISCUSSION. WHILE WE MAY NOT HAVE COME ANY CLOSER TO AN AGREEMENT ON HOW ANNUAL CATCH LIMITS WILL BE DETERMINED, A FEW ISSUES WERE RAISED WHICH I BELIEVE MUST BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION EVEN WITHIN THE LEGISLATIVE CONSTRAINTS THAT DICTATE THE NEED FOR THESE LIMITS:

1. WE DO HAVE 40 YEARS OF DATA, WITH A FEW YEARS OF SPECIE SPECIFIC DATA, WHICH MUST BE USED TO DETERMINE THE ACL's.
2. WHILE IT IS SAID THAT THERE IS A LEVEL ON UNCERTAINTY IN THE ABOVE DATA WHICH WOULD RESULT IN SOME LIKELY DOWNWARD ADJUSTMENT IN SETTING THE ALCs , THERE IS EQUAL IF NOT GREATER UNCERTAINTY AT SEFSC NOAA FISHERIES SERVICE WHICH HAS **NO VIRGIN ISLANDS DATA** ON WHICH TO BASE ANY DECISION OR TO MAKE ANY ADJUSTMENT.

3. THE SHELF AND SUBMERGED GEOGRAPHY, AS WELL AS THE FISHING CUSTOMS AND PREFERRED CATCHES OF THE THREE ISLANDS ARE SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT AND DATA FROM ONE CANNOT BE APPLIED TO THE OTHER.
4. THE MONUMENTS, THE TERRITORIAL PARK, AND MANY CLOSURES, SEASONS AND OTHER CONSERVATION METHODS HAVE BEEN PUT IN PLACE OVER THE YEARS, FOR WHICH OUR FISHING COMMUNITY MUST BE GIVEN CREDIT IN SETTING THE ALCs.
5. SOME MORE RECENT MEASURES, SUCH AS THE GILL NET BAN, HAVE NOT HAD THEIR IMPACTS ASSESSED.
6. A MORE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH MUST BE TAKEN TO PRESERVING OUR SHORELINE AND NATURAL MARINE RESOURCES. IT CANNOT ONLY BE THE FISHING COMMUNITY THAT BEARS THE FULL RESPONSIBILITY FOR CORRECTING WHAT MANY FACTORS HAVE CAUSED.
7. FISHING AND LIFE ON THE SEA IS A STRONG AND GENERATIONAL CULTURAL TRADITION THAT GOES BACK CENTURIES, AND OF COURSE IT IS AN INTEGRAL PART OF OUR ECONOMY. ANY DAMAGE TO IT WILL HAVE AN ADVERSE IMPACT ON OUR COMMUNITY, AS I ANTICIPATE THE UPCOMING REPORTS WILL CONFIRM.

ALL OF THAT BEING SAID, ALL OF US HAVE A STRONG STAKE IN MAINTAINING A HEALTHY OCEAN AND FISHERIES , AND THIS CAN BEST BE DONE THROUGH COLLABORATION.

I THEREFORE STRONGLY RECOMMEND THAT:

- THE ALCs BE SET AT THE AVERAGE OF THE HIGHEST LANDINGS OVER THE LAST FIVE YEARS FOR A PERIOD OF 3-5 YEARS.
- THAT ALL PARTIES COOPERATE IN DEVELOPING ACCEPTABLE SCIENTIFICALLY SOUND DATA COLLECTION MEASURES AND REPORT AS REQUIRED.
- THAT AT THE END OF THE 3-5 YEARS THE NEW ISLAND SPECIFIC DATA BE USED TO SET THE ALCs.
- THAT NOAA, THE ST. THOMAS FISHERMENS ASSOCIATION, AND SCFA EXPLORE THE POSSIBILITY, FEASIBILITY AND SUITABILITY OF A

COOPERATIVE APPROACH TO SETTING AND DISTRIBUTING LIMITS. THE FINAL DECISION WOULD BE UP TO THE LOCAL ASSOCIATIONS.

- THAT NOAA, THE VIRGIN ISLANDS FISH AND WILDLIFE, AND OTHER RELEVANT AGENCIES WORK WITH ALL OF THE STAKEHOLDERS IN THE LOCAL ISLAND COMMUNITIES TO DEVELOP A HABITAT PRESERVATION PARTNERSHIP TO BEGIN TO ADDRESS ALL OF THE FACTORS THAT ARE IMPACTING OUR OCEANS AND FISHERIES, AND TO TOGETHER PLAN AND IMPLEMENT PROGRAMS TO PRESERVE OUR WATERS AND ALL OF ITS USES AND ENJOYMENTS FOR GENERATIONS TO COME.

I LOOK FORWARD TO INCREASED LEVELS OF COOPERATION BETWEEN NOAA, THE CARIBBEAN FISHERIES MANAGEMENT COUNCIL, THE SOUTHEAST REGION, OUR LOCAL AGENCIES, AND THE U.S. CARIBBEAN FISHING COMMUNITIES, AND A WIN-WIN OUTCOME FROM THE MEETINGS THIS WEEK AND GOING FORWARD.

TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE PRIOR CLOSURES IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS, AND PLEASE CONTINUE TO NEGOTIATE IN GOOD FAITH WITH OUR FISHERMEN.

NO ONE HAS MORE AT STAKE IN PROTECTING THE FISHERIES AND SEA RESOURCES THAN THOSE WHO DEPEND ON THEM TO MAKE A LIVING – TO TAKE CARE OF THEIR FAMILIES – THE FISHERMEN.

I WISH YOU A PRODUCTIVE MEETING AND DECISIONS THAT WILL BE APTLY DESCRIBED AS “WIN-WIN”.

THANK YOU FOR THE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE THESE COMMENTS.



DONNA M. CHRISTENSEN  
MEMBER OF CONGRESS