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St. Thomas Fishermen's Association
P.O. Box 502974
St. Thomas, USVI 00805

The Ole Wife

Newsletter of the St. Thomas Fishermen's Association
Protecting our Natural Heritage and Culture

THANK YOU!

St. Thomas/St. John/St. Croix

Heartfelt gratitude goes out to the Virgin Islands community for helping to make the St. Thomas Fishermen's Association a success. Together, we spoke as one voice, with a common goal of protecting our natural heritage and culture; ensuring the fishermen of the USVI a place at the table to define the regulations managing our resources. It is only by joining together, working together and supporting one another that we can continue this success.

We wish to thank the fishermen, their families and members of the USVI community for supporting the STFA through attending meetings, purchasing STFA t-shirts, and most importantly, for giving us no less than 6,000 signatures of support prior to meeting with the Caribbean Fisheries Management Council.

In addition, we thank Senators Hill and Berry who have been constantly supportive. We thank Senator Hill for the resolution before the Senate that Collette Monroe read at the CFMC meeting. Tony Cyntje from Senator Berry's office also carried the fight to the

Feds and we thank both of them.

We especially thank our wonderful Delegate to Congress, Donna Christian who has spent considerable time on our behalf and who has introduced a bill to the Congress to extend Virgin Islands waters to match Puerto Rico's Territorial sea. She sat through the long and tedious meeting in San Juan and provided valuable and supportive testimony.

Eddie Delagarde from her office has been invaluable in helping us.

Through your efforts, we were able to offer the STFA's "preferred alternatives" to CFMC management actions. These actions will be voted on in the next CFMC meeting **May 3 from 9:00-5:00 and May 4 from 8:30-5:00 in the Conference Room of the Frenchman's Reef and Morningstar Marriott Beach Resort in St. Thomas. It is very important that we get as many fishermen to attend as possible to let them know our voices count!!!**



Managing Our Own Fisheries

San Juan, PR

The CFMC meetings on May 3-4 will decide the management actions that will regulate our livelihoods

As part of the deal with the CFMC not to use area closures, the STFA agreed to help during the public hearings to “harmonize” Territorial and Federal fishery regulations. As part of this effort STFA members presented the CFMC measures at Public Hearings on St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John.

The negotiations were give and take, but we began the very important process of having a voice in managing our own resources. The more input we receive from you, the people whose lives depend on the sea, the better the STFA can serve the needs of the fishermen.

STFA President Jimmy Magner, Julian Magras and Staff Scientist David Olsen assisted DFW and presented the CFMC measures at Public Hearings on St. Thomas, St. John and St. Croix.

Remember – we can't do this without you!

out its responsibilities for managing development in the coastal zone, pollution from sewage and industry, gathering data which can be used to manage fishery resources, or enforcement of fisheries regulations. Instead, the plan seems to take cheap shots at the Territory’s fishermen.

Since the plan has long-term consequences, STFA is asking the Virgin Islands Legislature to review it before it is finally submitted. The meeting has been rescheduled for May 9, at the Frenchtown Community Center at 7 PM.

STFA/CFMC Management Agreements

The measures being harmonized are:

1. Prohibit possession of misty, black, tiger, yellowfin, and yellowedge grouper from February 1 through April 30
2. Prohibit possession of black, blackfin, vermilion, and silk snapper from October 1 through December 30
3. Prohibit possession of Nassau grouper year round until the CFMC has determined that it has recovered
4. Prohibit possession of mutton snapper and lane snapper from April 1 through July 30
5. Prohibit the filleting of fish in federal waters of the U.S. Caribbean. And require that fish captured or possessed in federal waters be landed with heads and fins intact

A summary of seasonal closures in the USVI is shown in a table on Page 7 of this newsletter.

STFA Walks Out of DFW Meeting on Fisheries Plan

St. Thomas

“This meeting is null and void” declared STFA President Jimmy Magner just before walking out of a DFW meeting on their USVI Marine Resources and Fisheries Strategic and Comprehensive Conservation Plan.

DFW provided one day notice for the meeting which was held at the VI Gamefishing Club on 7 April despite their stated goal of obtaining public input. The plan must be approved by October of this year to continue getting Federal funding.

Once again, the plan is filled with unsupported allegations that overfishing is to blame for the VI’s environmental problems. STFA has provided extensive comments and requested a meeting, but this request was ignored.

STFA is in agreement that there should be a long-term plan for the Territory’s marine resources but that the plan should center on addressing DPNR’s continued failure to carry



Coral Health May Affect Fishermen

Silver Spring, MD

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has announced a 12-month finding on a petition to add the elkhorn coral (*Acropora palmata*) and staghorn coral (*A. Cervicornis*) to the list of threatened and endangered wildlife and to designate critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Critical habitats are the specific areas where the coral is found. These habitats contain the physical and biological features essential to the conservation of the coral species and frequently require special management considerations or protection.

The leading causes of damage to these elkhorn and staghorn coral are sewage, coastal run-off, diseases, global warming and hurricanes.

Based on a review of the best scientific and commercial information available on the status of the species, NMFS found that the petition action is warranted and will promptly publish a proposed rule to list the two species as threatened.

Threatened status means the coral is likely to become an endangered species in the foreseeable future. Should the status of these corals be elevated to endangered, there could be regulations implemented.

Rule-making on this matter will be discussed at the CFMC meeting in St. Thomas.

Spawning Fish Debut in UVI Film

San Francisco/USVI

Under funding from the Ocean Conservancy and the University of the Virgin Islands, Friday Films is producing a video about the Virgin Islands grouper spawning aggregations and the fishing community that depends upon them.

The production team traveled from San Francisco in December and February to film the breeding and to interview members of the community, island political leaders, and scientists.

STFA has been cooperating with this project in the hopes that it will show fishermen's concern for spawning aggregations and prevent unilateral closures such as UVI's Rick Niemeth pushed through the CFMC this year for Grammanik groupers with no input from the affected fishermen.

Video footage was presented to an STFA meeting in March to a very interested audience of our membership

We are currently planning to have a "Grand Premiere" of the film when it is finished.

STFA Suggests Change to St. John Monument

Washington, D.C.

Eddie de Lagarde of Donna Christiansen's office said that the Delegate's Office had been approached by the Dept. of Interior regarding a possible change in the Monument boundaries. The current boundary includes an "alley" of Territorial waters down the middle and the Feds are interested in "trading" for that area.

STFA, following a GIS analysis took three options to the 31 March meeting for member input.

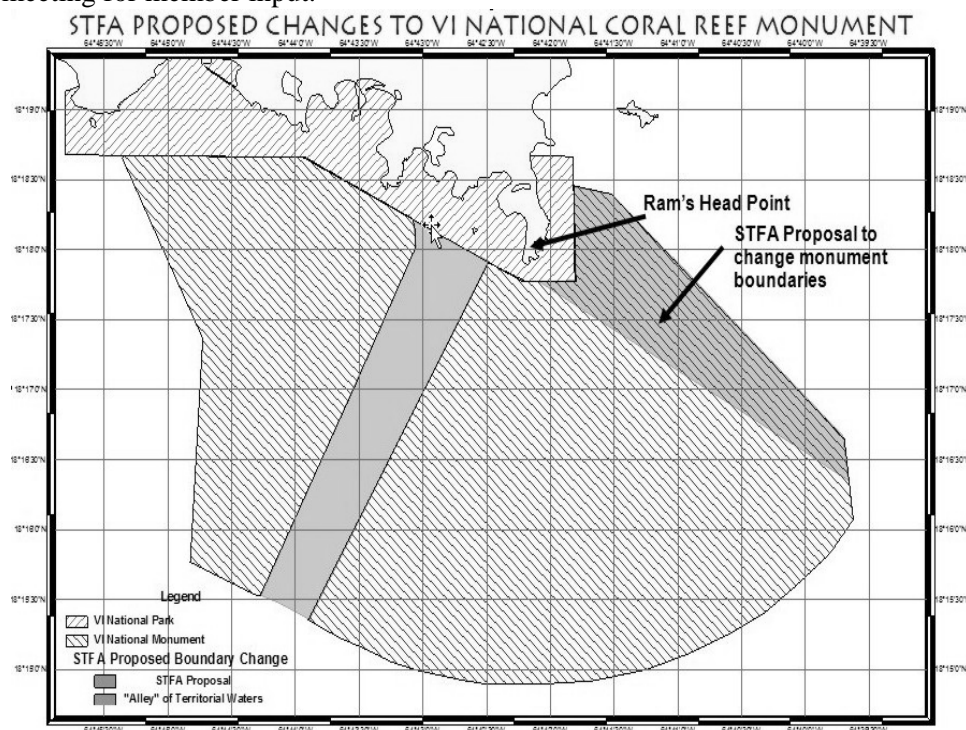
The members, while still requesting the Delegate to work towards the removal of the Monument in its entirety, selected the preferred option to the East (see map) for the following reasons:

- The eastern boundary would be based upon a constant compass heading from Ram's head point, enabling easy navigation and avoiding conflicts with the monument.
- The change would extend an area currently fished by our membership and reduce crowding in the southeast fishing zone.

The preferred option would have the Eastern boundary of the Monument at:

- 18.273 N, 64.661W (South East Point)
- 18.296N, 64.702W (North East Point)

STFA also asked the Delegate to involve our organization in future discussions. We also wish to thank the Delegate for her bill on the floor of the Congress (HR 271) to extend



the Virgin Islands Territorial Sea to match Puerto Rico's nine mile limit. Discussions on the floor of the Congress should start later this year.

SEDAR Workshop

St. Croix

STFA members participated in a SEDAR (Southeast Data, Assessment and Review), workshop in St. Croix. STFA President Jimmy Magner, Julian Magras, Winston Ledee and Staff Scientist David Olsen all participated in the week long event from March 14-20.

"SEDAR represents the real thing" said David Olsen. "These are the Feds' best and brightest, looking

carefully at actual data and trying to see if it can justify fishery management actions-no more just area closures."

The workshop centered on Yellowtail Snapper and Spiny Lobster. The general conclusions seemed to be "data aren't good enough to make any recommendations with confidence."

Jimmy Magner said that "when I first arrived there, I walked into a room full of scientists and mathematicians, full of scientific terms, acronyms and mathematical equations. I was totally in a fog as to what they were speaking about half the time. By the time I left there, I came out a lot wiser and actually understanding about 30 percent of how the rules of our fishery are made."

"The participants at this workshop were more than willing to teach us and show us the ropes of their jobs. It also worked the other way. These participants considered us a valuable part of this workshop as we were able to show them the weaknesses in their calculations, looking at the problems from our eyes, the fishermen."

"We were given ample time within the workshop to defend our fishery and our views were well received by all. We were shown a lot of respect.

"After a week in St. Croix, I left with a whole new look at these people. I made many new friends that, in the future, will be working along with us to gather the information we need to defend the fishery, showing the CFMC that we are more than capable in our capacity to work along with ALL parties, defending our fishery and coming to a common understanding amongst all."

"I look forward to the next SEDAR meeting to continue my learning curve and working with you, the fisherman, to keep up the standards

we need to in order to accomplish our goals."

"Remember, in these SEDAR meetings, the fisherman plays a big part. Our future still remains in our hand as long as we continue to work together."

A Word (or Two) From CokaBird

St Thomas

Welcome to the St. Thomas Fishermen's Association: Message from the President, Jimmy Magner

Back in December of 2003, when I attended the first publicized meeting of the Sustainable Fishing Act (SFA), the 700-page document they presented to me raised my alarm bells, along with a few of my fleas. Little did you or I know back then what we would be faced with today?

What has been accomplished since that first meeting, first and foremost, is the establishment of the St. Thomas Fishermen's Association. Through this association, together with NOAA and CFMC, we have saved 66 square miles of fishing territory, in exchange for closures for the spawning seasons of various fish. In addition, numerous meetings have been attended and great working relationships with many organizations such as CFMC, NOAA, DFW, members of the VI Legislature, our Delegate and the many members of the public who supported us.

Most importantly, the fishermen who support us in our endeavors have come together and formed the St. Thomas Fishermen's Association.

The Association has given us access to the scientists that make the rules. At these meetings, to my surprise, I found a willingness to work with us, the fishermen, in understanding our

You're Invited...

St. Thomas

As you've heard us say from Day 1, we can't be heard if we don't have a voice. The Caribbean Fisheries Management Council will be holding a meeting on VI Fisheries regulations on May 4 from 9:00 am -5:00 pm and May5 from 8:30 am to 5:00 pm at the Conference Room of the Frenchman's Reef and Morningstar Marriott's Beach Resort.

WE NEED YOU TO ATTEND EVEN IF ONLY FOR AN HOUR OR TWO.

The STFA will also be holding a Meet and Greet on Monday night to welcome the members of the CFMC and to let you, the fishermen, have some face-to-face time with them. The Meet and Greet will be held at the Frenchtown Community Center on Tuesday, May 3 from 7:00 to 10:00pm.

work, which is a very encouraging sign.

Out of all of this, the recognition of some fishermen stands out more than others in protecting their own industry of fishing. I'd like give the Association's heartfelt thanks to those that do support us, encourage others that haven't joined to do so, and help us work towards the goal of managing the fishery in a way that we can make our living while complying with the rules of the feds and the fishery.

On a personal note, I would like to give a big thanks to our staff scientist, Dave Olsen (who is also my personal coach) and to Julian (YumYum) Magras, who is vice president, for their tireless energy and never ending enthusiasm for a job well done, as well as the others that work behind the lines that help in the administration of the Association.

themselves rather than federal scientists who don't really understand what is actually happening".

It is the goal of the STFA Lobster Management Committee to come up with a plan to internally regulate fishing effort to the point that Maximum Sustainable Yield and eventually, Optimum Yield will be achieved on an annual basis. We will achieve this through development of a seasonally predictive model of the fishery and monthly adjustment of fishing effort.

Currently, we are in a data gathering mode. We have constructed the history of the directed lobster fishery back to its start in 1975. Landings data are being gathered directly from Committee members and through interviews with fishermen who are no longer involved in the fishery." said Winston.

It was presented at the San Juan CFMC meeting and did much to show the Virgin Islands opposition to having the Federal Government close down VI fishing without adequate data.

The resolution received response from both the Secretary of Commerce and Interior. Secretary of Interior Norton agreed, in her April 19 correspondence, that closures based on fishing landing data from outside of the Virgin Islands "was unfortunate" and that "additional closures be postponed until such time as adequate analysis of Virgin Islands' data provides justification for such closures".

Likewise, Secretary of Commerce Gutierrez announced, in his April 15 response, that the "Council changed its preferred alternative from closed areas to closed seasons, based on recommendations developed by fishermen and agency representatives from the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. After the Council adopts a final version. . .during Secretarial review, public comments will be invited on the SFA Amendment and the proposed rule".

STFA Lobster Committee

St. Thomas

Following the recent SEDAR meeting, Winston Ledee, Chairman of the STFA lobster management committee said "It is clear that the future of our lobster fishery is best addressed by the lobster fishermen

VI Senate Passes Resolution Supporting Fishermen

St. Thomas

In response to the community's outcry at proposed fishing closures s' fishermen, Senator Louis Patrick Hill drafted and offered **Resolution No. 1675**, opposing the closure of any additional fishing grounds in the Virgin Islands. The resolution passed with unanimous support of both Minority and Majority Senators at Legislative Session in February.

Article on St. Thomas in National Fishermen.

An article on the St. Thomas fishing scene will appear in the next issue of the National Fishermen magazine. That should be interesting as the reporter was down here during the early days of our fight against closures. He went out with Michael Berry during a particularly nasty stretch of weather and learned how hard it is to make a living fishing in the VI.



STFA Working on Health Insurance for Members

One of the upcoming benefits of membership in the STFA is the possibility of group rate health insurance. All members of the STFA were given the opportunity to sign up during the last two meetings at the Frenchtown Community Center.

Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company is currently investigating the prices for individuals, couples and families through Cigna Healthcare and will work with STFA to develop a package for our members.

It's not too late to sign up. We are still waiting for the costs, but can add members during the process. If you are interested, please contact Elizabeth Ban at 693-1392. She will need your name, date of birth and number of dependants interested in coverage (for example, self, spouse and #of children).

Ole Wives' Tales

Look for this section in each edition of The Ole Wife to learn about happenings in the VI fishing community. If you have anything you'd like to have posted here, such as an event, wedding, new baby or other important community information, please contact Linda Evans at 714-2556.

- It's that time of year again...the Gutu are running
- Yellowtail snapper catch is up
- The hatch has started and bait fish are starting to show up again
- Engines were stolen from Frances Bryan and Patrick

Berry's net boats at Hull Bay. They were later found on a Whaler in Frenchtown.

- **CFMC Meet & Greet is scheduled for Monday May 3 at 7:00 at the Frenchtown Community Center.**
- CFMC Public Meeting is scheduled for May 3 from 9:00-5:00 and May 4 from 8:30 to 5:00 at the Frenchman's Reef and Morningstar Marriott's Beach Resort Conference Room
- Association for the Betterment of Carenage Mother's Day Dance will be on Saturday, May 7 from 9:00pm – 1:00am
- STFA Board Meeting will be held on May 10
- Association for the Betterment of Carenage Mother's Day Fishing Tournament will be held Sunday May 15 starting at 5:30am with weigh-in at 12:00pm at the Frenchtown Fish House
- Father's Day fishing tournament is June 12
- Bastille Day fishing tournament is July 10.

Just to let you know that if you are interested in helping out with the Association, the doors are open. Whether you be a fisherman, wife, or friend, all are welcome and would be greatly appreciated!

Please contact Elizabeth Ban at 693-1392 or eban@uvi.edu.

STFA to Begin Independent Research Program

Following the SEDAR meetings, where it became very clear that Federal fishery scientists were limited by the availability of data, STFA Staff Scientist David Olsen and Field Research Director Ruth Gomez began development of a program to supply data on Yellowtails, Olewife, Mutton and Lane Snappers and Spiny lobster. In addition the plan would provide information on bycatch and general landings patters to Federal Scientists and will be submitted for funding under the Cooperative Research Program.



Species Closures in US Virgin Islands Following Harmonization of Federal and Territorial Regulations

Species	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Grammanik Groupers (State and Federal)												
Nassau Groupers (State and Federal)												
Red Hind Banks on St. Thomas and St. Croix												
Red Hind not on Designated Hind Banks												
Conch in Federal Waters except Lang Bank												
Conch in VI Waters												
Mutton Snapper and Lane Snapper (State and Federal)												
Deep Water Snappers (State and Federal)												
Yellowtail Snappers Snappers (State and Federal)												
Triggerfish (State and Federal)												

Frenchtown fishermen to be subject of UVI documentary

A new film is currently in production focusing on fishing and the marine environments of the Virgin Islands along with the research of the University of the Virgin Islands. The film is largely built from interviews and stories of fishermen and general citizens of the Virgin Islands combined with discussions from scientists, elected officials, and individuals involved in making federal policy regarding marine fisheries and environments.

The film is being produced by, Friday’s Films, a film company that has, for the last two years, produced films about fishing and marine environments around the world including The Bahamas, Fiji and California. Director Tim Kelly

says, “What we are trying to do is make a film that showcases what is happening in the Virgin Islands by telling the stories of the people that fish every day on the water, and are most impacted by what happens to the ocean. We hope the film will be informative, educational and also entertaining.”

The film is made in collaboration with The University of Virgin Islands, The Nature Conservancy and the Ocean Conservancy and is anticipates airings on PBS stations in the Virgin Island and across the United States. The film will be completed for release in late 2005 or early 2006.

For more information about the film please contact Friday’s Films at (415)-345-9596 or info@fridaysfilms.com.



Parting Shots

(Scenes from the St. Thomas Fishing Community)

St. Thomas Fishermen's Association
P.O. Box 502974
St. Thomas USVI, 00805

