



The Ole Wife

Protecting our Natural Heritage and Culture

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NEWSLETTER OF THE ST. THOMAS
FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATION

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**Next General
Membership
Meeting is on
Monday, June
30th.**

"there is no room for the fishermen"

Robert Mathes, DPNR Commissioner

Now we know the deJongh-Francis policy for Virgin Islands fisheries. It was announced Saturday in the Daily News when Mathes chose to listen to a small group of Continental environmentalists from St. Croix and ban the fishing practices of a group of local fishermen who had proposed a managed fishery that could serve as a model for all Virgin Islands fisheries.

Their proposal for a quota based harvest, closed seasons and non-transferable licenses would have phased the fishery out over the next few years but Mathes opted instead for a total ban which will create severe financial hardship for all concerned and probably simply lead to similar harvests of the affected species by spearfishermen instead of a managed

gill net fishery.

Mathes claim for protecting the resource will prove a failure and Virgin Islands fishermen on St. Croix fishermen will soon be facing heavy Federal regulation resulting in large part from St. Croix's Division of Fish and White Guys' failure over the past three decades to work cooperatively with the fishermen to manage the resources there.

Fishermen will be compensated from a \$55,000 fund for income losses of about \$1.2 million dollars annually. A similar buy back in Alabama would have resulted in nearly \$1.5 million in buy back funds.

The scary part of this scenario, however, is Mathes announcement that, unless fishermen jump when the enviros come up with their next set of rumors, opinion and letters to local papers which refuse to print infor-

mation coming from fishermen, that "there is no room for the fishermen".

Mathes himself, supported the management option until the enviros started their letter writing campaign. After that, he caved, apparently lacking the backbone to man up and do the right thing in support of the local industry and the population of local people who support local fishermen and who elected this governor.

Governor deJongh-we are really disappointed with this decision!

We supported you because we believed that you understood the value of the local industry in terms of food security, disaster response and its enormous cultural importance. This just strengthens the anti fishermen forces who have already announced on talk radio that they will be coming after spear fishing next..

Ledee Appointed to CFMC

STFA Vice President, Winston Ledee, has been appointed as the St. Thomas representative on the Caribbean Fishery Management Council, giving the STFA a direct voice on the Council for the first time.

Ledee, one of St. Thomas' leading lobster fishermen, is a soft spoken and thoughtful addition to the Council delibera-

tions. His most outspoken statement thus far has been to refer to some of the discussions as "Balderdash!" At the same time, his vast knowledge of local fisheries and the St. Thomas fishing community will be a significant addition to a Council who prefers opinion over fact.

Congratulations Winston! The STFA looks to you

to make sure that they don't pull any fast ones.



Winston Ledee, when he cleaned up at the 2006 Kingfish tournament

Monument Illegal-Governor Should Sue

Senator Liston Davis convened a hearing on the controversial coral reef monuments “taken” by President Clinton at the end of his term. Julian Magras, Jimmy Magner and David Olsen were all present to testify and found themselves in the unusual position of being

on the same side as Viridin Brown on the issue. According to Brown, this is once again where the “Friends of the Park” ignored the fact that they are Virgin Islands citizens and went directly to their friends in Washington.

Brown, who has long opposed the action as an illegal taking of Territorial submerged lands, was backed up by DPNR’s Coastal Zone Management attorney Winston Braithwaite. Attorney Braithwaite said that his legal research established that the formation of the

place.

The Senators agreed and passed a resolution condemning the action while recommending to the Governor to initiate legal action to regain the two areas for Virgin Islands citizens.

St. Thomas Seine Net Fishing

One of the problems facing Virgin Islands fishermen is that the Feds just don’t understand the scale of the local fishing industry. There are no 50 foot trawlers, no big purse seiners with ultra-light aircraft spotting the fish, just small boats with hard working fishermen fishing pretty much in the way that their fathers and grandfathers have always fished.

The hardest fishery for the Feds to accept is the seine net fleet. Virgin Islands seine net fishermen fish from small 16-18 foot boats filled with 600 fathoms of nylon seine that generally reaches to around 40 feet in depth. Two to three (big) fishermen are also in the boats which search the shorelines and cays for schools of yellowtail, bonito, hardnose and gar. Most of the fishermen are of French heritage and the role of fishermen is filled with the names found in Anne Marie Danets, geneology of the local French community.

Seine net fishermen are a hardy bunch. Teddy and Chicken Chest, Patrick, Cheep Cheep, Robbie, Ricky, Kevin, Warren, Jerry and the rest spend their days following schools of fish until they figure out the perfect place



Patrick Berry and the crew with a large catch of Jacks.

and time to surround them with the nets. After being surrounded, the fishermen free dive the nets into a “6” containing the fish, purse the nets and fill their small boats. Sometimes the catch is big enough that fish are left “crawled” and emptied in stages. One net catch measured during STFA’s MRAG study was over 3,000 pounds. They may be fishing from little boats but they can catch the hell out of the fish!



Chicken Chest (Francis Bryan) loading a catch of hard nose over the side.

Another Fun Day Success!

WE DID IT!!!! October 2007 Fun Day was an absolute financial success. This just goes to show when people come together for a cause, they achieve great things. To date the STFA members have traveled and hosted meetings without undue financial burden on the fishermen themselves.

The Fun Day benefits ALL of the fishermen and therefore we need to continue our efforts this year with the 2008 Fun Day, taking place on Sunday, October 12th which we hope to be an even greater success than the previous year. So YAY!!! for 2007 and lets get to work on 2008!

STFA Membership Dues

Attention all members and interested parties: Unfortunately, the STFA needs funds to remain an active lobbying power.

Membership Dues

\$50

In order for your membership status to remain current please make your contribution by **August 20, 2008**

Hats Off to our Softball Team Sponsors

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Upcoming Events-Mark Your Calendars

- ◆ The Committee for the Betterment of Carenage will host the annual **pre-Father's Day fishing tournament** on Sunday, June 8th, in Frenchtown.
- ◆ The Northside Sports Fishing Club is hosting their **20th Anniversary Bastille Day Kingfish Tournament** on **Sunday, July 13th at Hull Bay.**
- ◆ The STFA will be kicking off French Heritage Week with a **Pre-Bastille Day Dance at the Frenchtown Community Center on Friday, July 11th**, featuring music by Cool Sessions Brass. Tickets are \$10 and food and drinks will be on sale. Come out and support the Association!
- ◆ The STFA will have a booth at the **Chili Cook-Off on August 17th**, anyone interested in participating should call Julian at 626-7405.

Health Care for Fishermen

Congresswoman Donna M. Christensen's Contact Information:

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Nisky Shopping Center
2nd Floor, Suite 207
St. Thomas, VI 00802
Phone: 774-4408
Fax: 774-8033

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P.O. Box 5980
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Sunny Isle Shopping Center
St. Croix, VI 00823
Phone: 778-5900
Fax: 778-5111

Fishermen now have the opportunity of making a national fishermen's healthcare program a reality, but we need every fishing organization and every fishermen in the nation to call Congress and support our bipartisan legislation filed in both the Senate and House. Action by fishermen is now what it will take for this effort to succeed.

A full [ACTION ALERT](#) is posted on the Fishermen's Partnership Health Plan website at

www.fphp.org.

It has all the information about the bill, including a summary and the full text of the legislation.

If you support Health Care for Fishing Families, please call or visit the district offices of our representative, Donna Christian-Christiansen, to ask them to co-sponsor [H.R. 5404](#) and [S. 2630](#), "Commercial Fishing Industry Health Care Coverage Act of 2008".

Tell Congress that, "Healthcare coverage for

fishing families is the #1 need shared by every fishing family in the entire nation."

It is going to take a national team effort to pass this legislation and make a national fishermen's healthcare program a reality. We can do it this year if we work together.

Either contact STFA board members for a copy of the letter or go on-line at www.cfafish.org on the action alerts tab to download a copy.



L to R; Roy Crabtree (NMFS SE Regional Director), Julain Magras, Governor John deJongh, Jr., and Jimmy Magner during the "Meet and Greet" dinner for the 8 Council that manage fisheries in the U.S.

STFA Hosts the 8 Fisheries Councils

Executive Directors, Council Chairmen and various insundry NOAA Fisheries officials all met at the Frenchman's Reef from May 6-8 to strategize about how to implement the new Magnusan Act requirements.

The CFMC asked the STFA to host a "meet and greet" for visitors from as far away as American Samoa, Guam and Hawaii.

Typically, the STFA decided to knock their socks off with Virgin Islands fishermen hospitality at its finest!

The Frenchtown community center flowed with conch, lobster, crab, and our own local fish-all prepared in our own special way-all accompanied with plenty of Cruzan gold. Feed back was tremendous! Some of the Council members even sent thank you cards with donations for STFA to continue to fight the fight for fishermen here in the VI.

Governor John deJongh attended most of the



Jimmy Magner and Julian Magras engaged in a lively dialog with Dr. James Balsiger, Acting Assistant Administrator for NOAA Fisheries.

evening and even helped with some of the event preparations.

I think that it is safe to say that all had a good time and our visitors went away impressed by what Virgin Islands fishermen can accomplish!



STFA Condemns DPNR Fishery Management at Davis' Cultural Heritage Hearing

"It is clear that DPNR/DFW are not proper custodians of the fishing industry...if DPNR cannot accept responsibility for support and enhancement of the industry and has failed as resource managers. The DFW programs should be removed from that agency!"

On May 14, the STFA was invited to testify at a hodge-podge hearing relating to "Cultural Issues" at the VI Legislature. STFA is a protector of Virgin Islands culture in that it seeks to protect and preserve Virgin Islanders' long attachment of the marine resources that surround the islands.

The STFA condemned the continued failure of DPNR's fishery managers, particularly on St. Croix, which has been allowed, through incompetence and an antagonistic relationship with fishermen, to expand its fisheries beyond sustainable levels.

Landings in St. Croix in recent years have reached 150% of the St. Thomas/St. John levels despite the fact that St. Croix's fishing area is only one-sixth that of the northern islands.

Just one example of the failure of these programs is the status of conch resources on St. Croix. As shown in the accompanying figure, St. Croix conch landings have exceeded the Caribbean Fishery Management Council estimate of sustainable yield nearly continuously since 1991 with the full knowledge of St. Croix's highly unpopular Division of Fish and Wildlife.

In the STFA testimony we said that "It is our position that the Legislature needs to intervene and address this long-standing problem. It is clear that DPNR/DFW are not proper custodians of the fishing industry. Repeatedly, we hear DPNR Commissioners say that Regulation is their only role. We maintain this is untrue and that, if DPNR cannot accept responsibility for support and enhancement of the industry and has failed as resource managers, the DFW programs should be removed from that agency."

Winston is not the only

Continued on Page 6.

Ledee (Continued from Page 1)
STFA member involved in the Council. Currently STFA members hold the following positions on fishery management committees and boards:

CFMC-Advisory Panel (Jimmy Magner, Julian Magras, Winston Ledee, Ernest Quetel)

Technical Monitoring and Compliance Team (David Olsen)

Annual Catch Limits (ACL) Development Group (David Olsen, Julian Magras)

DPNR Fishery Advisory Committee (Julian Magras, Bryson Bryan, Catherine Bryan, Jimmy Magner).

"The purpose of this study is to see which vent releases compressed fish and also to ensure the fishermen can still maintain a sufficient catch".

Pilot Trap Vent Study Underway

On February 18, 2008 the St. Thomas Fishermen's Association kicked off a pilot trap vent study in conjunction with Caribbean Fishery Management Council.

The study addresses one of the Magnusan Act requirements to address bycatch from fisheries.

Earlier STFA studies funded by NOAA fisheries have identified bycatch species and mortality rates.

This study will be an 80-sample long study with 4 trap fishermen (Ernest Quetel, Winston Ledee, Tony Blanchard and Julian Magras) hauling a total of 12 traps, 20 times each, along with their regular gear.

These traps have different vents (1x4, 1x6 and 2x4) and controls, which are regular trap. The purpose of this study is to see which vent releases compressed fish (blue tang, butterfly fish, box fish etc.) and also to ensure

that fishermen can still maintain a sufficient catch. Thus far the study has been progressing but it is still too early to make predictions on the results. However, the 2x4 vent has shown a 99 % decrease in catch after 20 samples taken. By August there should be a status report of the study. The project is being monitored by Julian Magras, STFA Chairman.

Olsen Resigns at DFW

One of Governor John deJongh's first appointments was STFA founding member David Olsen as Director of the Division of Fish and Wildlife. He is also one of the first resignations, leaving office on March 31, 2008.

Olsen worked hard to try and institute a Territorial Management Plan while in office and convened a joint meeting of the Fishery Advisory Committees to revise Territorial regulations in anticipation of the upcoming changes stemming from the Magnusan-Stevens reauthorization.

The final straw came when DPNR Commissioner Robert Mathes announced that he was going to enforce the ban on gill netting in St. Croix instead of implementing the management regime developed with the affected fishermen which would phase out the fishery rather than abruptly ending. "This is a case where outsiders are protecting fish at the expense of the fishermen" said Olsen recently.

Fun Day 2008

Fun Day 2007 was a day full of camaraderie, entertainment, local seafood and softball!

The STFA's Fun Day is the organization's main revenue-generating event for the year. **On October 7,**

"Enforcing the net ban is not going to solve the "problem" that the pro-ban people are presenting. Last year, St. Croix's SCUBA fishermen made over 14,000 trips, (over 100,000 dives). As an aside,

The final straw came when DPNR Commissioner Robert Mathes announced that he was going to enforce the ban on gill netting in St. Croix instead of implementing the management regime developed with the affected fishermen which would phase out the fishery rather than abruptly ending it.

I can't find one of them who says the reefs are covered with algae-that is a story being put out by the pro-ban group. If the ban is put in place, I look for those numbers to increase with little or no decrease in the landings of parrot fish and surgeon fish."

The ban is not the answer; management of the resources is. Management is not going to come about from a small minority of well-organized individuals who are blinded to the larger issues.

We heard at the Legislature last week that the monument closure probably had its origins when the "Friends of the Park" chose to ignore local priorities and sovereignty and went directly to the Federal agencies. This ban is another case where a small group of individuals have manipulated the process and polarized an issue beyond the point where rational planning for management can take place.

2007 the STFA hosted its third annual Fun Day at the Joseph Aubain Ballpark in Frenchtown. The day was filled with games, music by Cool Sessions Brass and good old seafood.

Perhaps the highlight and highly anticipated portion of the day was

the "Rivalry Game". This being the infamous square off between the Northside and Frenchtown softball players. While the game is taken very seriously, mainly for bragging rights, it was a fun game. Congratulations to the Northside team for coming out on top...but remember...there's always next year!

SPECIAL THANKS TO

Alexander's Bella Blu, Aramark, Bellows International, Betsy's Bar, Bolongo Bay Beach Resort, Bryan's Electrical Contracting Corp., Caneel Bay Resort, Caribbean Gifts & Things, Caribbean Petroleum Inc., Coca-Cola, Committee for the Betterment of Carenage, Cost-U-Less, Craig & Sally's, Cruzan Rum, Cuzzins Bar & Grill, CYOA Yacht Charters, Divi Carina Bay Resort, Erica's Total Beauty, Forecast Consulting, Forever Flowers, Frenchman's Reef & Morning Star Marriott Beach Resort, Frenchtown Civic Organization, Frenchtown Deli, Gladys's Café, Green



Old Wife's Tales:
News and Rumor from Around the Bay

CFMC Working to Set Catch Limits

Magnusan Act catch limits are on the way to the Virgin Islands! STFA's Chief Scientist David Olsen recently returned from a meeting of the Council's Technical Monitoring Group in San Juan and reported that "The SFA approach is going to come back and bite us in the ass again if we're not careful!"

The SFA document was widely criticized for its lack of data from the Virgin Islands. Now the Council is including VI data and calculating catch limits from historic landings pattern. This means that overfishing in St. Croix is likely to cost both St. Thomas and Puerto Rico by reducing their share of the total.

The only way to approach this, according to Olsen is to make sure that the limits are calculated separately for each geographic area, not from the combined areas. In this way the limits can reflect the productivity of each area and over fishing in one area will not cost fishermen in the other areas.

The prime example of this is St. Croix's conch fishery where landings have reached 8 times MSY due to Council and Territorial government inaction. If the SFA approach is employed, St. Croix will receive a share that is above the MSY while St. Thomas will receive almost nothing because northern fishermen do not fish conch and Puerto Rico will receive less than its share.

~ The STFA would like to send our wishes of good health to **Teddy Bryan**.

~ Congratulations and best wishes to **Gerald "Chubs" Greaux** and Giselle Cardona, whom will be married in Ponce, Puerto Rico on June 1st.

~ Congratulations to Board Member, **Bryson Bryan**, on his recent graduation from the University of the Virgin Islands where he earned a Bachelors of Arts.

It is important to note that this fundraiser is accomplished and successful because of the community. Our sponsors and volunteers make this day and the year round efforts of the STFA possible. Thank You!



Jimmy Magner measuring whelks.



Players from both the Frenchtown (in yellow) and Northside (in maroon) teams come together on the mound after the annual softball game.

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Protecting our Natural Heritage and Culture

