Fishermen testify dredging hurting their trade

Several commission members told the dredging opponents, however, that the commission is bound by the state’s Coastal Use Act. They said the act mandates extraction of coastal resources, and if the dredging opponents disagree they need to take their case to the Legislature.

“Whether we like it or not, the commission is strapped by the laws that are on the books,” said commission member Newman Trowbridge.

In addition to hurting seafood production, dredging has worsened coastal erosion and possibly damaged an important state boundary, dredging opponents testified.

“I’m an angry fisherman because there are very few reefs between Point au Fer and Marsh Island,” said Dr. Donald Pavy of the Acadia Redfish Association.

The closer a shrimp drags his nets to a reef, the bigger his catch, shrimp fisherman John Mialjevich told the commission.

But Mialjevich said he now goes to spots where there have been productive reefs and finds only holes in which he ruins his nets.

The “pounds per unit effort” are down, and the problem will get worse as more reefs disappear, he said.

Because of reef destruction, the area in which fish can be caught is getting smaller and smaller, Pavy said.

“There are fewer fish. There is no question about that,” he added.

Not only sports fishermen are finding it hard to catch fish, but crabs and shrimp trying to make a living in the area are facing difficult times, he said.

(See REEFS, Page 7-B)

Reefs

(Continued from Page 1-B)

redfish association.

In addition, the state faces a possible boundary change that “could be devastating to Louisiana taxpayers” because of the loss of boundary reefs between Point au Fer and Marsh Island, Landry said.

He attacked the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries for failure to enforce regulations on shell dredgers in the past.

A representative of the department conceded that there has been no one assigned every day to check on the location of dredgers, but he said the department has investigated all complaints it has received.

“We’ve seen violations, reported them, and nothing is done,” Landry said.

If a company is caught intentionally dredging in a restricted area, DNR will probably revoke the firm’s permit,” said DNR Deputy Secretary Winston Day.

This is the first time DNR has had authority over shell dredging because the companies have only been required to obtain federal permits in the past.

However, the main enforcement authority in the case remains with wildlife and fisheries, which also gets paid by the companies for every yard of shells dredged.

DNR’s permits add restrictions that were not in the earlier permits by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, but most speakers Tuesday suggested that if the commission does not rescind the permits it should at least make them more restrictive.

Some of the suggestions were:

• Only grant the permit for one year until further data on the environmental impact can be obtained.
• Raise fines for violations from the current maximum of $500.
• Restrict dredging within 1,500 feet of any oiled reef.
• Restrict dredging within two miles of Marsh Island.
• Force dredgers to return dredged areas to a smooth enough condition that shrimpers can trawl without ruining their nets.
• Limit the depths to which dredgers can dig.
• Recall water bottoms in small tractors for dredging the way it is done for oil leases.
• Ask the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to conduct an Environmental Impact Statement on the effects of shell dredging.