Processors rap shallow trawling

COCODRIE (AP) — Louisiana will have to forbid shrimp trawling in its shallow marshes and bayous or watch catches decline everywhere, a group of processors says.

The state’s estuarine marshes are nursery grounds close, Sammarco said. However, he said he believes the Legislature will add LUMCON back to the budget.

“You should never let anyone put a net in the shallow marsh or bayous,” said Houston Foret, a Chauvin shrimp processor and a former member of the state Wildlife and Fisheries Commission. “It’s not the shrimp they catch but what they destroy.”

Alan Gibson of Tideland Seafood Co. in Dulac said he has seen people trawling in two feet of water.

The small shrimp that escape the net are often mangled, and others are killed because their gills fill up with the mud stirred up by trawling, Gibson said.

Processors discussed the issue recently during a meeting of the Terrebonne Economic-Development District Commission. The group met at the Louisiana Universities Marine Consortium’s research facility in Cocodrie to call attention to the center’s lack of funding and to discuss the seafood industry.

Under a budget submitted by Gov. Edwin Edwards, LUMCON would not receive any state money, said Paul Sammarco, who heads the facility. Universities, already strapped for cash, would have to decide whether to provide money for LUMCON.

Without state money, the consortium will be forced to return the federal research money it attracts or close, Sammarco said. However, he said he believes the Legislature will add LUMCON back to the budget.

The only people who would protest estuaries’ closure are the people with wing nets and small boats who fish there, Foret said.

“That’s why when you bring up sanctuaries, the (Wildlife and Fisheries) department puts its head down,” Foret said. “Every one of those people buy licenses. That’s money for the department.”

But protecting the estuaries would increase the amount of seafood the area produces because everything from shrimp and crabs to redfish and speckled trout depend upon the nursery grounds, he said.

Protecting the estuaries would also loosen the stranglehold that imported shrimp have on the market, Foret said.

“We can break those imports in one year,” he said.

Growing shrimp in a pond is a complicated and expensive process, Foret said. Buying diesel to run the pumps needed to run oxygen through the water 24 hours a day is expensive, and so is buying feed.