Acadiana bureau

FRANKLIN — The St. Mary Parish Police Jury joined Wednesday with two other coastal parishes when it rescinded its previous resolution calling for the end of shell dredging in offshore waters.

Ed Lennox of Ratcliff Dredging Co. made a presentation to the jury, claiming that information given by Richard Hayes, president of Save Our Coast Inc., was wrong.

At the last regular meeting, Hayes told the jury that shell dredging was destroying the coastline and that the bulk of commercial fishermen along the coast were opposed to the practice.

“At this time, there is no hard evidence that dredging has harmed anything — fishing or the coast,” Lennox told the jury.

He presented the jury with figures supplied by the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries that showed 1982’s offshore catches as better than 1981’s record season.

Earlier this week, the Vermilion Parish Police Jury rescinded a similar resolution calling for an end to dredging, as did Jefferson Davis Parish.

A motion to rescind the original resolution asking for the banning of dredging was made by Amelia Juror Loylis Duhan.

“I’m going to apologize for the actions we took at our last meeting,” Morgan City Juror Lawrence Michel told the jury and those in attendance prior to the unanimous vote approving the motion. “I’m the one who made the motion that we ban dredging, and I think we were just hasty.

“Mr. Chairman,” Michel told jury President Emory Jennings, “maybe it’s good that every now and then we make a mistake, because that way we get the people’s attention.”

The jury also let stand a resolution passed at its last regular meeting setting July 9 as the date for the people to decide the fate of the proposed home-rule charter.

The discussion was prompted by a letter sent to the jury by Berwick state Rep. V.J. Bella. In the letter, Bella enclosed a memo from the Legislative Advisory Council saying it would be to the parish’s best economic interest to hold the election for the charter on April 30.

The council’s reasoning was that half of St. Mary’s voting machines will be in place in the eastern end of the parish for the runoff election in the Morgan City Council race.

In his letter, Bella said it might be difficult to get the enabling legislation to hold the election passed through both sides of the Legislature in time for the April 30 election.

Wednesday night, state Sen. Anthony Guarisco of Morgan City assured the jury that enabling legislation could be passed in time for the election.

“It’s just a question of when you want to hold the election,” Guarisco said.

Critics of the jury’s decision to hold the election in July claim it is a purposeful move to call attention away from the charter and to guarantee a low voter turnout in an effort to kill the charter.

The jury took no action, thus retaining the July 9 date. Since it is not a normally called election day, however, the enabling legislation, once passed, will have to be submitted to the U.S. Justice Department for final approval.

While on the subject of the Justice Department, District 1 Juror Joe Davis reported that the department had approved the parish’s reapportionment plan.

The plan calls for the redistricting of Districts 1 and 2 in the western end of the parish and the creation of the parish’s only single-member district in the Amelia area.