

FWC Issues Order to Help Blue Crab Industry

By Kelly Beall
Water LIFE Commercial Fishing

The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC) has issued an executive order to waive four previously scheduled 10 day blue crab trap harvest closures in July and August this year. The FWC is taking this action to help relieve possible economic hardships on fishing communities that may occur due to the BP Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

Once a year we have a 10 day blue crab trap harvest closure. Our area closure goes from July 10th to the 19th. During this time the crabbers take all their traps out of the water to allow for derelict trap removals. Last year the crabbers of our area hosted two trap removal programs. The crabbers volunteered their time to remove the traps that may pose as a navigational hazard and to be good stewards of the waters they crab.

This year because the oil spill may affect our harvest later on, the FWC has waived this closure. It's hard to say when the spill will affect our harvest, but we are certainly glad to have it waived at this time.

There is also talk of making stonecrab season one month earlier as well. Last month they opened the oyster season 11 days earlier just in case those oysterman lose precious days of harvesting. Let's all hope we aren't going to lose any days anytime soon.

But it isn't a question of if, but when. Some may think we are jumping the gun, but this spill is affecting us locally as we speak. It's not just the waters that are closed. The seafood industry is feeling it right now. It's hard to say what is from the bad economy and what is from the spill. For example, there is plenty of

product that is safe to consume and safe to harvest, but many of the shrimpers, oystermen and fisherman are being employed by the clean-up instead of working in the seafood industry. They are making money and they're doing what they need to do to get the Gulf clean.

Because of this many trucks that once came down the west coast of Florida to pick up oysters and then headed back up the east coast are now only going to the east coast. Lack of fisherman equals lack of product to transport. This affects the crab sales because often it was the same truck and now they can't justify their trip for just crabs and no oysters. It's hard to understand unless you're in the business, but believe me those trucks that come from the north to buy our excess product keep our fishermen in business.

Another way the spill affects us indirectly is perception. Even if it happens subconsciously, having a view of the oil spewing into the Gulf every day does not put anyone in the mood for seafood. We have inadvertently lost our branding of "wild Gulf caught seafood".

What once attracted buyers to our product has created second thoughts. We went from being the top healthy choice to - uncertainty, for lack of a better explanation. Even though we are many miles from the spill it is still trickling on over. Sometimes those hit by the bands of the storm are worse off then those hit directly by the eye. Those who take a direct hit can be somewhat compensated (if that's even possible - on such a great loss) whereas those affected indirectly are shorted. For the time being - we are lucky to be better off, but we are still going to need help.

Spinner/Blacktip Confusion Continues

EXCERPT FROM A LETTER:

Dear Water LIFE

I have spoken to numerous guides and bait shop owners and they say either:

- They are the same.
- A Spinner is a big Black-tip.
- If they are different I can't tell.

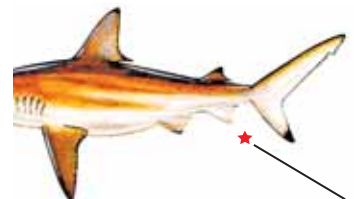
The Commission says in print, "Many sharks are difficult to identify and it is up to anglers to learn how to properly identify the sharks they harvest".

Peter Sanderson

Editor Notes:

This is ass backwards because The SPINNER SHARK has all back fin-tips.

and The BLACKTIP SHARK (shown below) has all but one black fin-tip. It does NOT have a black tip on its anal fin.



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