

**Habitat Protection/Restoration Committee Report  
June 3, 2019  
Mr. Patrick Banks – Chair**

The agenda and minutes of the April 2019 meeting were approved.

*Manna Fish Farms, Gulf of Mexico Finfish Aquaculture Operations*

Dr. Kelly Lucas, Director of the University of Southern Mississippi Thad Cochran Aquaculture Center, presented an overview of the plans to install aquaculture facilities in the Gulf waters offshore of Pensacola, Florida. Overall, the Committee appreciated the level of detail provided during the presentation and the considerations taken for this effort. A few questions about the location of the cages and the proposed finfish species for grow-out from fingerlings were discussed. Red Drum, Almaco Jack, and Striped Bass were the top three finfish species currently being considered by the company.

The Committee expressed concern regarding the design and location of the cages, and how this might affect entanglement of fishing gear as well as other marine animals. The team from Manna Fish Farms described materials used for the cages, and mentioned that they will work with the pertinent agencies to install proper lighting on buoys for signaling and navigation around the cages.

The Committee also asked questions regarding the genetics of the broodstock, the use of medication, and the impacts this may have to the native population of Red Drum or any other finfish species they decide to grow-out later in the facilities. Dr. Lucas reassured the committee that they are using local broodstock and that part of their team includes an aquatic veterinarian who will monitor the fish and the genetic diversity of the broodstock.

In addition, Mr. Diaz inquired about the time it takes from stocking the cages to harvesting. Dr. Lucas replied that the process takes about a year, depending on the finfish species. Additionally, the Committee discussed the influence of aquaculture practices on the market price of the proposed fish species. Dr. Lucas expects the influence would not be major given that most of the Red Drum currently being sold in restaurants come from aquaculture sources. Manna Fish Farms is also planning to create an economic model to take a closer look at this matter.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.