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Theme: Special Sessions

Session: TuG3 - Rebuilding the seafood industry after a natural disaster: a case study of hurricanes Katrina and Rita

Title: **Stormy Monday: Singing the Hurricane Disaster Relief Blues in Florida**

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Abstract: Stormy Monday: Singing the Hurricane Relief Blues in Florida

The 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons have been particularly devastating to the Gulf Coast region of the U.S. During 2004, hurricanes Charley and Ivan, among others, took dead aim at the Florida Gulf coast and caused excessive structural damage to residences and near-shore structures. These storms in general missed the major commercial and recreational fisheries centers of the state, though near-shore aquaculture operations in Florida were devastated. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005 took swipes at Florida as they spun off to the north with devastating consequences to the commercial and recreational fishing industries of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. Entire communities, along with their shore-side infrastructure and fleets were virtually eliminated in coastal Louisiana and Mississippi.

Almost ignored after the devastation created by earlier storms during 2005 was hurricane Wilma, whose impact was confined to the Florida coast. Hurricane Wilma cut a swath across the lower Florida peninsula, impacting primarily the regions of the state located below Lake Okeechobee. The damages, though severe in certain locations, were less structural in nature, and more disruptive in terms of power outages, road closures, transportation delays, local flooding, etc. However, hurricane Wilma virtually eliminated the trap fishery gear within the Florida Keys. The lobster and stone crab trap fisheries are the most valuable fisheries in the region. Without the gear, and relief funds to replace the gear, the fisheries have almost ceased to operate.

This presentation will document the losses estimated for the Florida Keys trap fisheries as a result of hurricane Wilma. Attempts to achieve recognition of the gear losses by the industry and frustrations with attempted requests for federal assistance will be described. The findings of a recent NOAA/Sea Grant/Industry workshop will be described which provides some insight from outside and within federal/state relief agencies as to how the existing relief system may

function on a more effective and timely basis. The presentation will also attempt to compare and contrast the fisheries-related disaster relief efforts attempted by the various states impacted by the 2005 hurricane season.