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Hotline Provides Consumers with Latest Information About Florida Seafood Availability

TALLAHASSEE – Seafood lovers who are confused about the availability of Florida seafood products due to the Gulf oil spill can now get daily updates about the ongoing commercial harvest. The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services has implemented a new toll-free hotline at 1-800-357-4273 to provide consumers with current information about the status of Florida’s open and closed fishing harvest areas, the availability of seafood varieties, and general pricing information.

“Because of the extensive news media coverage of the Gulf situation, many consumers are confused about whether Florida seafood is being harvested and if it is available in stores and restaurants,” Florida Agriculture Commissioner Charles H. Bronson said. “We want consumers to know that Florida’s commercial fishermen continue to harvest wholesome seafood products from the waters that are unaffected by the oil spill. Florida seafood is safe and plentiful.”

Bronson said the telephone hotline will be updated daily with information about the Gulf situation. He also reminded consumers that -- in addition to the Gulf waters off Florida’s west coast -- Florida’s fishermen also harvest numerous seafood varieties from the Atlantic waters off the state’s east coast.

“The Florida peninsula has more than 1,300 miles of coastline, and our commercial fishermen continue to work hard to bring in their catch for the enjoyment of consumers,” Bronson said. “The commercial fishing industry is important to our state, and we want consumers to know that they can buy Florida seafood with confidence.”

The information that is available by calling the 1-800-357-4273 hotline will also be posted online at the Department’s seafood web site www.FL-Seafood.com where consumers can also find links to other pertinent web sites including the Florida Department of Environmental Protection. Webcams placed at various coastal locations and in retail establishments will be added to the web site later.

The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Florida Department of Environmental Protection, the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration are continually monitoring water and product samples.

“If and when the quality of Florida seafood is impacted by the spill, we will take immediate action to close the waters to commercial seafood harvesting,” Bronson said. “Our commercial fishermen take great pride in the quality reputation Florida seafood

products have earned, and we would never put any product on the market that would tarnish this hard-earned reputation.”

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