

SOUTHERN FISH COMPANY

PRODUCERS AND WHOLESALERS

PORT ISABEL, TEXAS

TELEPHONES

PORT ISABEL, TEXAS

PHONE NO. 2 PHONE NO. 7

May 17, 1949.

Dr. Hector Perez Garcia,
Corpus Christi, Texas.

Dear Dr. Garcia:

I read with great interest the write up about you in the Brownsville Herald yesterday and was greatly impressed by the splendid work you have been doing and, without doubt, you should feel gratified by the results you are getting.

Very much along the lines of the conditions you are so sincerely against I am taking the liberty of writing you in detail about some conditions in this town which, I believe, after you have analyzed same you will, perhaps, give us a little assistance by getting in touch with your Representative at Austin and asking that he do all in his power to kill House Bill # 787.

This is a small community of about 2,000 people. The majority are Latin Americans. Situated, as this town is, on the Coast for the last hundred or more years, the Mexican population has fished for its livelihood. The fathers and then their sons have specialized in this craft. There being no agricultural land surrounding, there was never any other need for them to learn other crafts. They have done nicely. They sell their fish to the Fish Houses here, at top market prices, and have lived a peaceful and independent life and have been happy. Quite a few have established small business here which are directly dependent on the fishing industry. There are grocery stores, barber shops, cafes, beer and amusement places all practically owned and operated by Latin Americans whose clientele are the fish men.

There has always been a group of what they call themselves "Sport" fishermen, some of whom are very wealthy, others who are merely envious to know that the Latin Americans are more efficient and able to catch fish than they are. This group some of whom live for miles away like to come to Port Isabel occasionally, catching a few fish and resenting the efforts of these people who live here making an honest living by their toils. These "Sportsmen" leave no money in the town, being in a big hurry to get out and for the most part bringing their lunches, gasoline, etc. with them. They have their days outing and away they go, maybe to visit here in six months. The economy of this town is supported by the people who make their living here, the schools and churches are supported by the people who live here and not by incidental occasional visits.

When the War broke out, our Latin American boys went right down the line for democracy. Port Isabel should indeed be

proud of its Latin American Veterans of both World Wars. They fought bravely in all European Theatres. Some were wounded, some died but their part to make deomcracy live should not be in vain. It was these sons of Fishermen, and fishermen themselves that stepped out and faced the common enemy. They were fighting for a better way of life. Little did they dream that, upon their return, the livelihood of their families would be snatched away by some selfish sportsmen who wated to keep this town as a play pretty for the fish they can catch.

Up until this last 51st Legislature met, we had a very fine Representative in Austin who understood the problems of the people of Port Isabel. He was Augustine Celaya of Brownsville whom you may know. However, unfortunately for the Latin Amriecans of this community, Mr. Celaya sought the post of Representative to Congress and was defeated. We now have another Representative in Austin of this district who is not familiar with the economy of the town or of the efforts of the Latin Americans to eke out their living in fishing. Naturally, the Sportsmen jumped at the opportunity to get him to Sponsor a Bill No. # 787, which is a malicious Bill in effect, clsoing the Bay to Commerical Fishing. It is so camouflaged and pernicious that it appears as a Consevation Measure. In other words it merely states that only Gill Nets of five inches mesh will be permitted to fish in the Laguna Madre of Cameron County. No one can catch fish by the method described above. The fish Companies have thousnads of dollars worth of gill nets which have become obsolete when the Intra Coastal Canal was dug here as the Currents are so swift, gill nets are impractical.

There is a political aspect to the efforts of the so called " Sporstmen " which you will see by a copy of ~~which we sent to the Port Isabel Pilot~~ ~~in Austin~~ which explains why our Doctor is taking such a militant stand against the livelihood of our Latin Americans. This Doctor, I might add, has been here for some thirty years and every penny he ever accumulated came from the Mexican fishermen who would now that he needs them no longer, apparently, is putting them on relief or what have you. They are as an old shoe to him - no longer needed and cast aside.

To explain further this House Bill # 787 was referred to a Committee in the Legislature composed of 21 members. The chariman of this Committee is, I believe, Harvey Shell of your City. Naturally, the Bill being contested, a hearing was called (Public) some weeks ago for both sides to explain their view points. This Doctor and some of the Sprotsmen and American fishermen who had not been acrively fishing for the last few years went to Austin as well as the Memebes of the Fisheries Association.

There were only seven members of the Legislators prewent which was not a quorum, but they heard the arguments of both sides. The question was asked one of the Sports group and he being the star witness fot the proponents of the group if he could make a living fishing with gill nets as House Bill # 787 outlines. He said " No. " One of the fish association members read the article out of the Port Isabel Pilot where the political aspirations of this Doctor were the main cause

*an article
appearing
in the
Port Isabel
Pilot, our
Newspaper*

underlying the introduction of the Bill and the threats, in case his aspirations were not fulfilled.

As there was no quorum present, no action was taken. We were quite happy about this feeling that the delay would be of help.

We have Mr. Augustine Celaya representing our interests in Austin. He came home for the week end and the minute this group knew that he was out of town, very miraculously this Game Fish Committee met and passed the Bill out of Committee without a dissenting vote, when and, if we understand the procedute, this was a contested Bill and a local Bill and it should not have been passed out of Committee except by holding another Public Hearing when there was a full quorum present. They even pulled wires to have the printing dispensed with and it is on the Speakers Desk now for call.

Dr. Garcia, if this Bill is passed, it will work a remedous hardship on a a peaceable community who have patriotically and in every way done their part to support the Community. They bought bonds and gave freely to any good cause. They have their familes here who are dependent on this business.

Of the 600 fishing licenses issued here in the year 1948 ninety percent of the personell are ,atin Americans. They sent petitions to Austin, they sent telegrams, they held meetings, etc. wanting the help they should have, but, unless we can muster up some strong support, it will be the tragedy of Port Isabel if House Bill # 787 passes.

I went into this in great detail, Dr. Garcia, after reading about your aims and ideas. If you were less kind than you apparently are I would not have done so.

If you can appeal to your Representative, or perhaps, you may know others who also can and would, we would greatly appreciate anything you can do.

Most cordially yours,

SOUTHERN FISH CO.

BY:

J. P. Wait

COPY OF AN EXCERPT APPEARING IN THE PORT ISABEL PILOT April 15, 1948.

BY: DR. J. A. HOCKADAY:

QUOTE:

The fight to prevent the complete closing of the Bay to Seine and net Fishing as waxed warm though most of twenty years. The Writer (Dr. Hockaday) took a very active part in this fight. I expended considerable energy and much time in an effort to educate the Sportsmen Public regarding the many problems involved concerning our fish life, both practical and scientific. I made an effort conscientiously to convince them that many matters had a bearing on the decreased fish life and that the Commercial fishing seines and nets contributed in only a small degree to the diminishing supply. I wrote column after column of magazine and newspaper comments, and spoke before many service clubs and other groups upon this subject. To what extent my efforts succeeded in keeping the Bay open, I have no way of judging, except that they were not closed. I have not changed my opinions in any respect regarding the virtues of my past arguments, based upon Legal Fishing. UNQUOTE

This was dated April 15th of last year, which is election time in Port Isabel. The opposing political party was elected, and Dr. Hockaday became very bitter. Objecting to some of the propaganda used by the winning party he stated in the next issue.

QUOTE:

SINCE THIS PROPAGANDA SEEMS MOST Effective when used among the Latin Americans at Port Isabel it reacts quite favorably to the over all interests of Port Isabel by perpetuating in power the political machine which I discussed at length in my column this week. I am, therefore, forced to consider which is the more damaging to Port Isabel's interests, the closing of the Bay to seine and net fishing or throttling development through the political machine. I am rapidly becoming convinced that the latter is probably the greatest detriment. I am becoming so convinced that I hereby resolve that if it is ever used again in any future political contest in Port Isabel that I will sponsor a movement to forever close the Bay to seine and net fishing in order to eliminate this propaganda for political purposes in the future. IF ANY ONE THINKS I AM BLUFFING, LET THEM CALL MY HAND. UNQUOTE.