



# Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium



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## Back to School

### Program lands charter-boat operators in classroom



Capt. Ben Fairey of Orange Beach, Ala., heard about the Dolphin SMART program a while back. It is a program geared toward the nature tourism industry that teaches tour operators the best ways to view dolphins and the laws that protect the marine mammals.

"It was very evident to me that we needed the same type of program for our charter fishing industry," he said.

Acting on this suggestion from the captain of the Necessity, the Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium and a group of its partners, including the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Marine Resources Division, Dauphin Island Sea Lab, Orange Beach Fishing

Association and Gulf Shores and Orange Beach Tourism, created a program to offer charter boat operators information about their industry and the environment.

"We are excited to bring this education opportunity to our local fleet and preserve the cultural integrity of our family businesses," said Joanne McDonough of the Nature Tourism Initiative, which is overseeing this training program. "Our course encourages sustainable fishing practices by following the program's code of ethics and statement of commitment, which are based on best practices, guidelines and legal requirements."

*Dauphin Island Sea Lab Fisheries Technician Frank Carassoa, left, shows Capt. Igor Subert, Capt. Bryan Watts and Tammy Jackson-Rowell where fish otoliths (ear bones) are located in a red snapper. Looking at ring patterns on the bones can tell scientists the age of the fish, which offers another layer of data when studying fish populations.*





### The Certified Fisher Invested in Sustainable Harvests (CFISH)

program includes classroom training and hands-on activities, as well as a review of charter-fishing businesses' advertising and websites. CFISH program coordinators also will climb aboard and evaluate the fishing charter and teach ways of fishing that help sustain fish stocks. In the end, qualifying captains and deckhands will receive a CFISH certification.



"As an avid fisherman and a tourism professional, fishing plays a key role in our guests' vacation experience, and we are honored to support this ground-breaking program," said Herb Malone, president/CEO of Gulf Shores and Orange Beach Tourism. "Our local captains have been through a lot, and this training will help everyone secure a bright future."



*Sean Powers, Ph.D., a University of South Alabama associate professor of marine sciences, shows charter captains and deckhands a \$4,000 satellite tag that scientists attach to sharks to gather data about the predator's position and other information, such as salinity, temperature and the last depth of the animal. Powers, who also serves as the vice-chair of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council Science and Statistical Committee, encouraged fishermen to report tagged fish and explained the basics of determining fish populations.*

taught the basics of stock assessments and fisheries research, management issues, catch shares, artificial reef program history and reef updates. The fishermen ended the day with a tour of the Estuarium.

"We can educate the captains and mates to be able to convey the important environmental and fish-related issues to our customers," Fairey said. "It makes us more professional."

Maj. Chris Blankenship of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Marine Resources Division was an instructor at the Feb. 15 workshop at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab in Dauphin Island, Ala.

"The good thing about this training," he said, "is that deckhands and captains will be able to give information to the people about possession limits and why they are where they are. They will also be able to give information about the artificial reefs and what they are fishing over. And, this program gave me the opportunity to talk to a direct group about the laws and regulations that affect them."

Other workshop instructors included scientists who are part of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, the Dauphin Island Sea Lab and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Marine Resources Division. They