

IN MEMORIAM

JAMES “JIM” H. COWAN, JR.

March 9, 1954 – August 11, 2021

James Howard Cowan, Jr. passed away on August 11, 2021 at the age of 67 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Cowan was born to James Howard Cowan, Sr. and Imelda Lee “Patsy” Cowan on March 9, 1954 in Fayetteville, North Carolina. His family later moved to Tampa, Florida, and he spent his formative years in Virginia Beach, Virginia. Jim was an avid football player who later fell in love with sportfishing, particularly along the Outer Banks of North Carolina. He earned his BS (1976) and MS degrees (1981) in biological sciences from Old Dominion University, where he worked with Ray Birdsong. He earned an MS in applied statistics and a PhD (1985) in marine science from Louisiana State University (LSU), where he worked on Gulf of Mexico ichthyoplankton. Cowan was a postdoctoral scientist at the LSU Coastal Ecology Institute and later at the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory in Solomons, Maryland, where he worked with Ed Houde on fish early life history and recruitment dynamics. His first faculty job was in the department of marine sciences at the University of South Alabama, with a joint appointment as a Senior Marine Scientist at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab. In 2001, Cowan returned to LSU, where he earned the title of E. L. Abraham Distinguished Professor in 2012.

Cowan’s teaching and research efforts in the field of fisheries science made him well known in the Gulf of Mexico region, nationally, and internationally. He created and taught a range of fisheries-related courses, including fish recruitment, estuarine ecology, field and lab methods, fisheries oceanography, and physical oceanography. He advised dozens of PhD and MS students, who now hold academic, agency, or nongovernmental organization positions around the globe. Cowan’s early career was focused on fish early life history and the recruitment problem, and later in his career much of his and his students’ research centered on reef fish ecology. Red Snapper *Lutjanus campechanus* was often a feature of Cowan’s later research; his 2007 co-edited book on Red Snapper ecology remains on many bookshelves today. Cowan also co-edited two other books, co-authored seven book chapters, and authored or co-authored over 150 scientific articles. He was an active member of the American Fisheries Society (AFS) and was a Past President of its Early Life History Section. In 2007, Cowan was given the AFS Award of Excellence in Fisheries Management for “for inspirational leadership in the fishery profession and substantial achievements for AFS and the fisheries resource.”

Cowan served in various scientific advisory capacities with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, including stints as the chair of its Reef Fish and Coastal Migratory



Pelagics Stock Assessment Panels, and was a longtime member of the Gulf Council’s Scientific and Statistical Committee. In addition, he served on several National Research Council study committees and technical review panels, as well as review panels for various the National Science Foundation programs. Lastly, Cowan served as a U.S. delegate to the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea and the Pacific Marine Sciences Organization.

In addition to Cowan’s many scientific accomplishments, he was also a good friend and gracious host to many. When Cowan’s name would come up in conversation, it was inevitably followed by someone fondly describing how he had taken them to sample Cajun dancing, jazz music, Louisiana cuisine, literature, or fishing somewhere for something. We all have anecdotes about our adventures with Jim. Many of us not only worked with Jim for decades but also called him a good friend. Cowan will be missed both for his science and for his welcoming comradery. Among his former students, they have expressed their gratitude for his encouragement, drive, and accessibility. In the end, perhaps Cowan’s greatest legacy in realm of fisheries is the good will he fostered among scientists, managers, and fishers, among whom he was well regarded as an honest broker who aimed to keep politics out of the science. [AFS](#)

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