



**Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Supply Chain Roundtable
Meeting Notes
4 May 2021 - Webinar**
(recording at: - <https://youtu.be/OYG6XLRZE8>)

SR Participants

Big Easy Foods – Derrick Nagle
Biloxi Freezing & Processing Inc. – Richard McGowan
Cox's Wholesale Seafood – Nancy Mathews
DoRan Seafood – Hunter Pearce
Gulf Pride Enterprises – Alyssa Young
JBS Packing – Mark Leckich
Paul Piazza & Son, Inc. – Garet Hutchinson
Philly Seafood – Regina Peña
Wood's Fisheries – Reese Antley
Sunnyvale Seafood – James Baros

Other Attendees

Audubon Nature Institute – Laura Deighan
TX Sea Grant – Laura Picariello

SFP Staff

Megan Westmeyer, Katie Mihalik

General Agenda

1. SR industry funding
2. 2021 SR workplan review
3. TED Compliance/Effectiveness update
4. Observer data verification project
5. Full bycatch characterization study update
6. Harvest control rule outreach planning

Purpose/Objectives

The purpose of this meeting was to provide SR participants with an update on 2020-2021 workplan activities and next steps, as well as to discuss funding needs.

Key Points

1. SFP has facilitated Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery improvement work since 2008 (through FIPs, then the SR) with the support of philanthropic funding. This funding is no longer available, and in order to continue facilitating this Supply Chain Roundtable SFP will need \$7,000/year from the industry. Based on the current number of SR participants, and anticipating a possible decrease in SR participation due to the funding request, this is likely to be between \$550 and \$900 per year per participant.
2. NOAA recently released a new Biological Opinion on the impact of the shrimp fishery on endangered species, including sea turtles. This document contains a new methodology for estimating the impact of the fishery on sea turtles based on observer coverage data (instead of TED compliance/effectiveness). This new method results in a far smaller estimate of shrimp-fishery-induced sea turtle mortality, but it is not yet clear how certification standards and bodies will view the new method, especially given the low observer coverage rate. This may be more clear when the Mississippi/Alabama MSC pre-assessment is completed, as the new Biological Opinion (in draft form) was considered during this pre-assessment.
3. The full bycatch characterization project is ongoing. While some vessels selected to carry NOAA observers have agreed to also participate in the bycatch characterization project (by storing bycatch samples on the vessels and in shoreside facilities until the samples can be transported to the lab), others have not. There appears to be some confusion about the origin of and need for this project. SFP advised the SR that it would be helpful if the SR participants could sign a joint letter of support for the project and send it to their suppliers, to increase vessel-level willingness to participate. SFP will provide a draft letter for the SR to consider.
4. The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council has convened the ABC Control Rule Working Group to evaluate the harvest control rules in a number of fisheries – this is a good opportunity for the SR to ask the Council to develop a formal harvest control rule for the shrimp fishery. Before doing so, it would be wise for SR participants to reach out to members of the Shrimp Advisory Panel to share information on the need for a harvest control rule and cultivate their support. SFP will provide background information and help SR participants identify and reach out to Shrimp Advisory Panel members.

Meeting Notes

1. Welcome and intros, agenda review
 - a. Review of SFP's antitrust policy
 - b. Agenda review
2. SFP request of industry funding for SR coordination
 - a. SFP no longer receives philanthropic funding for GoM Shrimp work (haven't since 2018). Donor funding shifting to other countries, like Mexico, which now accounts for most of MW's workload. SFP did continue to fund some GoM shrimp work through unrestricted grants because of history with the industry and the interest of many of our buyer partners, but shifting focus led to a 50% decrease in the level of effort MW could assign to this work in 2019 and 2020.

- b. SFP is starting to seek funding from industry for many SR operations
 - c. GoM Shrimp SR would require \$7,000 to fund SFP staff time (8 hours/month, which is reflective of 2018 level of effort) and public report hosting.
 - d. Currently there are 14 SR participants, though some may drop out due to funding request. But it is likely that a membership fee \$550-\$900/year/participant would be adequate (flat rate fee per company).
 - e. Could also consider a sliding scale for membership fee based on business size.
 - f. If industry cannot provide funding, the alternative is to close SR and have individual FIPs handle all activities
 - g. Feedback:
 - i. Nancy Mathews (Cox's Seafood): this is a reasonable funding request and we support it
 - ii. Laura Deighan: asks SR participants to seriously consider this request, because it has been very helpful to have SFP's involvement and coordination of tasks at a Gulf-wide level
 - iii. Reese Antley (Wood's Fisheries): definitely reasonable, and its important to keep this sort of unified Gulf-wide approach instead of just a state by state approach
 - h. Action: MW to survey SR participants for willingness to provide funding then provide final cost estimates/participant.
3. 2020-2021 SR workplan approved by participants in October contained 4 main tasks
- a. Request NOAA update of TED compliance data – progress made thanks to Nancy Mathews
 - b. Advocate for a Harvest Control Rule – SFP strategized with Laura Deighan (Audubon Nature Institute G.U.L.F.); have actionable advice for SR
 - c. Further comparison of ELB and Observer Program shrimp CPUE data
 - d. Support Full Bycatch Characterization Project – will have update today from Laura Picariello of Texas Sea Grant
4. NOAA update of TED compliance data
- a. Since 2014 TED compliance data has been used to determine the impact of the shrimp fishery on sea turtles. This information generated positive results in the 3 year FIP audits (conducted in late 2019) but has not been updated since 2019.
 - b. Nancy Mathews reached out to Michael Barnette of NOAA in November 2020 and asked about an update (as the SR has done multiple times)
 - i. Michael Barnette responded that NOAA is working on a new methodology for estimating sea turtle bycatch and they don't expect to continue relying on and posting TED compliance and TED effectiveness information online
 - ii. New methodology will be in the upcoming Biological Opinion on the impact of the US shrimp fisheries on endangered/threatened species, which was supposed to be published in April 2021
 - c. New BiOp actually was published on time...
 - i. NOAA advised that TED inspection data could be biased (could overestimate or underestimate sea turtle impacts)
 - ii. Announced shift to using observer data to estimate impacts of shrimp fishery on sea turtles

- iii. Calculate likelihood of turtle mortality based on observer info, using Bayesian modeling (good for data-limited situations)
 - iv. Results: much lower estimates of sea turtle mortality
 - v. Impact on FIPs: unknown how certification standards and bodies will view the new method, especially given the existing issues centered around low observer coverage rate
 - vi. Possible action: Hire CAB familiar with MSC and RFM to evaluate?
5. Observer Data Verification Project
- a. Background/refreshers on project:
 - i. To address one of major issues identified in 2018 Bycatch Workshop – low observer coverage rate, need verification of accuracy
 - ii. Electronic logbook (ELB): 20% coverage rate
 - iii. Observer program: 2% coverage rate
 - iv. Compare shrimp catch per unit effort (CPUE) from ELB and observer programs; if similar, then ELB program can serve as verification of the accuracy of the observer program
 - b. ASPA funded project in 2019
 - c. Results were as expected – indicate that the shrimp catch per unit effort calculated from the observer data is nearly the same as the shrimp catch per unit effort calculated from the electronic logbook program.
 - d. This is evidence that even with a low coverage rate, the data collected by the observer program is still reflective of the data that would be collected if a larger percentage of the fleet was sampled – serves as basic verification of the observer program accuracy
 - e. The problem is that the data in this study had to be highly aggregated across years to enable comparison with the publicly available info from the observer program, which averages all data across a multi-year period.
 - f. Another problem, report still not finalized. SFP/Audubon reviewed a draft and sent some feedback/suggested edits to ASPA to convey to the consultant. No known final report.
 - g. Possible action: if CAB is hired to review new method for estimating turtle impacts, maybe they could also review the current version of the observer data verification report and give feedback on whether it will be adequate or a more detailed analysis will be required.
6. Feedback on possibility of hiring a CAB to review issues described in points 4 and 5.
- a. Laura Deighan: On the review of the new Biological Opinion and calculations of impacts on sea turtles, this was considered in the MS/AL MSC pre-assessment even though the Bi-Op was not yet final. Let's wait and see the results of that PA because it might answer the question.
 - b. Laura Deighan: On Observer Data Verification Project, she is working to get final copy of report from LGL.
 - c. Laura Picariello: If SR does move forward with hiring a CAB to review these items, it might be good to wait until the Full Bycatch Characterization Project is completed in 2022 and include that in the review.
 - d. Conclusion: makes sense to wait a bit then commission on update on some of these bycatch related issues only.

7. Full bycatch characterization project

- a. This project was designed to address one of the primary barriers to certification identified in the Bycatch Workshop this SR funded back in 2018, a lack of recent and systematic full characterization of bycatch.
- b. LGL Ecological Research Associates and Texas Sea Grant received \$300,000 in funding from the Saltonstall-Kennedy grant program for a cooperative research program in which NOAA observers will bag, tag, and freeze all unidentified specimens in the basket sample from each tow and bring back to port, allowing full bycatch characterization in a lab on land. SR participants can play a role by helping to transport from bycatch samples with frozen shrimp, along normal transportation routes (\$300,000 was cap for funding request and that did not cover sample transportation, in fact it only covers a portion of the samples that could be collected by the observers).
- c. Project began in 2021. Laura Picariello thanked those who have already been helping with bycatch sample storage and transportation. Others who volunteered to help may still be contacted in the future as more vessels are selected to carry observers.
- d. Observer program vessel selection happens on a trimesterly basis – Gary Graham (Texas Sea Grant, retired) and an LGL technician then reach out to vessels that have been selected by NOAA to carry observers and ask if they are willing to support the project by allowing the observer to store bycatch samples on the vessel, and then store then store the samples on land until they can be transported to the lab for analysis
 - i. First trimester (January – April) resulted in 30 vessels selected to carry observers. 18 of those vessels agreed to participate in the bycatch study by storing bycatch samples on vessels at on shore until transportation could be arranged. Of those, only 8 vessels ended up taking observers onboard for unrelated reasons, but those other 10 vessels will still likely end up with observers during the second trimester.
 - ii. Second trimester (May-August) vessels were just notified – 72 vessels selected to carry observers, only 20 have agreed to participate in the bycatch characterization project
- e. There are some issues with some vessels/fleets/regional associations pushing back on requests to participate in sample storage. Some of it is frustration around a lot of projects coming at them, and there are a lot of issues going on (ie: new TED compliance and BRD testing). Some is confusion on what's regulatory and what their being asked to do voluntarily. Some has just been due to miscommunications confusion about the origin of this project (don't realize origins are in the SR).
- f. SFP/Texas Sea Grant/Audubon believe it would be helpful if the SR would send a joint letter to their Gulf of Mexico shrimp vendors, explaining the origin of this project (SR funding workshop), the need for it (markets demanding verification of sustainability), and asking for their cooperation and support
 - i. Focus on the fact that this is an independent project and our goal is to help continue to build the reputation of the industry as a sustainable industry.

- ii. This is a huge opportunity to address a longstanding issue in sustainability
- iii. We hope this will help relationships on the boats that are don't quite understand what we're trying to do or have not been very responsive.
- g. All willing SR participants would be listed as signers, then the joint letter would be sent by individual SR participants to their vendors (there will be redundancy, but that's ok and will show that the SR is unified on this topic).
- h. Feedback
 - i. Nancy Mathews: asked if letter could be targeted to those vessels already selected for observer coverage, to prevent others from thinking they are going to be asked to carry observers beyond what is already required
 - ii. Laura Picariello answer: list of vessels selected to carry observers is somewhat confidential – she cannot widely distribute, but she could have one on one conversations with SR participants that are concerned about this and could help them focus their outreach. But it is also important to know that some of the regional fishing associations have also been pushing back against this project (not SSA, they supported the project from the beginning) and it would be helpful for them to see a unified message from the processors/distributors.
 - i. Action: SFP will work with Texas Sea Grant and Audubon to draft letter and circulate with SR participants to solicit feedback.**

8. Harvest Control Rule

- a. One of the issues flagged up in the 2019 FIP progress audits was lack of a harvest control rule. Harvest control rules are rules and management actions that are agreed upon in advance, dictating the response to changes in stock status with respect to thresholds (e.g. population becomes overfished or fishing mortality exceeds thresholds). It is meant to allow a quick response to a problem, preventing the problem from getting worse. For shrimp it would be a reduction in effort if the shrimp population falls below a threshold.
- b. In the US, harvest control rules are required in fisheries by National Standard 1 – we just call it an ABC (Allowable Biological Catch) control rule. The Gulf Council is still supposed to ask the Scientific and Statistical Committee to define an Allowable Biological Catch and come up with a control rule that specifies what will happen if that catch level is exceeded and the population declines.
- c. All the shrimp fishery has right now is the following, from Amendment 15: “If the Maximum Fishing Mortality Threshold is exceeded for two consecutive years, the appropriate committees and/or panels (e.g. stock assessment panels, advisory panels, Scientific and Statistical Committees) would convene to review changes in apparent stock size, changes in fishing effort, potential alterations in habitat or other environmental conditions, fishing mortality and other factors that may have contributed to the decline.” That won't be enough to meet the requirements of most eco-certifications, and it doesn't actually meet the US requirements in National Standard 1.
- d. The GMFMC has convened the ABC Control Rule Working Group in 2021 to evaluate the control rules in a number of fisheries – we can ask that shrimp be included. It's very early in the process and an ideal time to engage. SR to send a

letter to the Council requesting that the ABC Control Rule Working Group include the shrimp fishery. Focus on the fact that National Standard is not currently met, but can also introduce the idea that this as a need of the industry if they want the option of pursuing certification but that shouldn't be the main focus.

- i. Brief anyone on Shrimp AP that we know to try to get their support early, so they understand the need for an HCR from our perspective before the Council consults them about it. AP members include:
 1. Steven Bosarge, *Vice Chair*
 2. Thu Bui
 3. Kimberly Chauvin
 4. Glenn Delaney
 5. Gary Graham
 6. Andrea Hance
 7. Harris Lasseigne
 8. Lance Nacio
 9. Can Nguyen
 10. Franklin Parker
 11. William (Corky) Perret, *Chair*
 12. Patrick Riley
 13. John Williams
- ii. Need SR participants to identify AP members they know personally, and are willing to speak to about this issue.
- iii. Also need someone from the SR to take the lead on reaching out to Gulf Council (could do so via public comment session during June Council meeting or could send formal letter). SFP/Audubon will provide as much background info as possible, but industry needs to be out front on this request, explaining why it is needed from an economic perspective.
- iv. Feedback:
 1. Nancy Mathews: is this likely to be a contentious issue? MW response: is a good chance some AP members will not like it because any increase in regulation/management upsets them, but that's why we want to have these informal/friendly discussions first, to try to avoid tense situations later. Nancy agrees it is better to have this sort of side bar conversation in advance.
 2. Laura Picariello: likely to be some additions to the Shrimp AP during the June Council meeting
- v. Action: SFP to collect private feedback/volunteers from SR on Shrimp AP outreach and provide talking points. SFP to identify SR lead for outreach to the Gulf Council and provide a draft letter for the SR to sign.