

**Shrimp Committee Report
January 27, 2025
Chris Schieble, Chair**

The Committee adopted the agenda (**Tab D, No. 1**). The Committee then approved the November 2024 meeting minutes (**Tab D, No. 2**), with the replacement of the word ‘production’ on page 34, line 40 with the word ‘reduction’.

Draft Shrimp Framework Action: Modification of the Vessel Position Data Collection Program for the Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Fishery (Tab D, Nos. 4a-d)

Staff reviewed the three motions from the December 2024 Shrimp Advisory Panel (AP) meeting noting that, at its April 2024 meeting, the Council meeting passed a motion similar to one of the Shrimp AP’s current motions, resulting in a letter transmitted to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) in April 2024.

Ms. Bosarge (Shrimp AP Chair) reviewed the revised agency cost estimates for the draft Shrimp Framework Action that was presented during the December 2024 Shrimp AP meeting. She reviewed how the costs of the commercial finfish electronic logbook program are much lower than the estimates of the shrimp electronic logbook program. She noted that Chapter 4 of the draft Shrimp Framework Action was not prepared at the time of the Shrimp AP meeting and was unable to be reviewed by AP members. Staff inquired if the commercial finfish electronic logbook program described by Ms. Bosarge collected vessel position data, which is the crux of the shrimp data collection program, and for further elaboration on the type of data that is collected by the commercial finfish electronic logbook program. Dr. Walter (SEFSC) responded that the two programs were not comparable. He added that about 150,000 trips per year are recorded on cell phones with e-trips for the commercial finfish electronic logbook program. In contrast, vessel position recording cannot be completed with a cell phone and requires its own device, physically installed on a vessel, whether through use of a current cellular electronic logbook (cELB) device or a vessel monitoring system (VMS) device. Dr. Walter also stated that, regardless of the actual costs, Alternative 3 creates a duplicative system and additional costs to both the taxpayer and the industry.

A Council member inquired if the agency has the funds to start the program proposed under Alternative 3. Dr. Walter responded that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) had received two Congressional appropriations of \$850,000 to support the Early Adopter Program, but NMFS has not received additional funds nor anticipates long-term funding to support the proposed program under Alternative 3. A Committee member noted his appreciation of Ms. Bosarge scrutinizing the estimates of agency costs. He noted that some cost estimates may be higher or lower for both Alternatives 2 and 3.

Dr. Walter presented on estimated costs to industry and to NMFS. He also addressed the potential for malfunction in VMS devices. He stated that devices installed through the Early Adopter Program provide a cost-savings for industry under both Alternatives 2 and 3 and

emphasized that the industry would be ineligible for the national VMS reimbursement program for VMS devices purchased under Alternative 3. He stated that a multi-year phase-in process would better allow for all vessels to receive national reimbursement for VMS devices purchased under Alternative 2. He also noted that Alternative 3 will require duplication of existing systems for data collection and storage, help desk, a type-approval process, and data security.

A Council member stated that he was puzzled why the Shrimp AP would prefer Alternative 3, when it appears to be more expensive than Alternative 2 for them. Dr. Walter responded that he could not speak for the industry. A Committee member noted that the Shrimp Biological Opinion requires shrimp effort monitoring to have equal or greater coverage than that of the decade ending in 2021 and inquired why full monitoring coverage through a census would be needed if industry effort is declining. Dr. Walter responded that one of the challenges for shrimp effort monitoring include getting a true temporal, spatial representation of the industry, which is critical for management issues such as Aquaculture Opportunity Areas. He added that a census would not only ensure accurate representation but would also eliminate the need to extrapolate the effort from a sample to the entire industry. Dr. Walter stated that more spatially explicit data is going to be needed to monitor interactions with protected species, such as giant manta rays and smalltooth sawfish. The Committee member inquired if the agency would have cost-savings by not reimbursing devices for the shrimp industry if Alternative 3 was selected as the preferred alternative. Dr. Walter responded that those funds would instead be allocated to another fishery likely outside the region, such as Alaska. The Committee member stated that roughly \$600,000 could be provided to another fishery in that case.

Staff then presented on the draft shrimp framework action. He reviewed the Council's timeline to-date to address the data collection program for the Gulf shrimp industry and the Purpose and Need statements. He reviewed the current alternatives and addressed the economic analyses before discussing potential next steps with a tentative timeline. Staff noted that, if a preferred alternative is selected at the January 2025 Council meeting, mailing addresses for federal Gulf shrimp moratorium permit holders would be required from the Southeast Regional Office in order for mailouts to be sent prior to the April Council meeting. A Council member noted that a virtual webinar would be useful in soliciting public feedback, and a Committee member concurred.

The Committee reviewed and discussed the Shrimp AP's motion from its December 2024 meeting to modify the language of Alternative 3.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, **to adopt the Shrimp AP recommended language for Alternative 3. Alternative 3 would be revised as follows:**

Alternative 3: Implement a cellular ~~VMS (eVMS)~~ **ELB (cELB)** requirement for the Gulf shrimp fishery that provides archived position data **to the SEFSC that is** compatible with the SEFSC's shrimp effort algorithm. If selected by the SRD, the owner or operator of a vessel with a SPGM would be required to install a ~~NMFS~~**SEFSC**-approved ~~eVMS~~ **cELB** that archives vessel position when on a **shrimp** fishing trip in the Gulf and automatically transmits those data via cellular service to a non-OLE NMFS server.

NMFS/SEFSC- approved eVMS cELBs would be type-approved for the Gulf shrimp fishery through a process external to 50 C.F.R. § 600.1501.

Motion carried with 1 opposed.

A Committee member stated that Alternative 2's language should be consistent, to the extent possible, with Alternative 3.

The Committee recommends, and I so move, to **modify Alternative 2 as follows**:

Alternative 2: Implement a vessel monitoring system (VMS) requirement for the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) shrimp fishery that provides, at a minimum, archived position data when on a fishing trip in the Gulf that is compatible with the Southeast Fisheries Science Center's (SEFSC) shrimp effort algorithm to a NMFS server. If selected by the Science and Research Director (SRD), the owner or operator of a vessel with a Gulf shrimp moratorium (SPGM) permit would be required to install a type-approved VMS unit (50 C.F.R. § 600.1501).

Motion carried with no opposition.

A Committee member noted the Shrimp AP's preference for Alternative 3 to be the preferred alternative. Ms. Levy (NOAA GC) stated that the Council will need to provide clear rationale on how Alternative 3, if selected as the preferred, is consistent with National Standard 7, as it states that "Conservation and management measures shall, where practicable, minimize costs and avoid unnecessary duplication."¹

The Committee recommends, and I so move, to **make Alternative 3 the preferred**.

Alternative 3: Implement a cellular VMS (eVMS) ELB (cELB) requirement for the Gulf shrimp fishery that provides archived position data to the SEFSC that is compatible with the SEFSC's shrimp effort algorithm. If selected by the SRD, the owner or operator of a vessel with a SPGM would be required to install a NMFS/SEFSC-approved eVMS cELB that archives vessel position when on a shrimp fishing trip in the Gulf and automatically transmits those data via cellular service to a non-OLE NMFS server. NMFS/SEFSC- approved eVMS cELBs would be type-approved for the Gulf shrimp fishery through a process external to 50 C.F.R. § 600.1501.

Motion carried with one in opposition.

Staff inquired what would happen if the agency determined that the shrimp framework action is inconsistent with National Standard 7. A Committee member responded that, upon receipt of an amendment from the Council, the agency evaluates its consistency with federal laws. The agency will then approve, partially approve, or disapprove an amendment. If partially approved or disapproved, NMFS would explain the basis for the disapproval and provide

¹ <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-50/chapter-VI/part-600/subpart-D/section-600.340>

recommendations concerning the actions that the Council could take to address the identified issues.

Mr. Chair, this concludes my report.