



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration**

National Marine Fisheries Service
Southeast Fisheries Science Center
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June 3, 2024

Mr. Kevin Anson
Council Chair
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Dear Mr. Anson:

Your letter of April 25, 2024, to me notes, “the Council requests that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) adopt the following priorities for utilizing the Congressional FY24 appropriation of \$850,000 for electronic logbook (ELB) development and implementation for the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) shrimp industry:

- “1) Sufficient funding to ensure the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) server has capacity to receive and store shrimp fishery vessel position data.
- “2) Develop a statistically robust design for distributing units to a representative portion of the fleet that would sample the shrimp fleet at levels equal to or greater than the last 10 years.
- “3) Cover the cost of providing units and cellular service to those shrimp vessels, pursuant to the Early Adopter Program.”

The letter also mentions the Council asked for “a presentation at its August 19-22, 2024, meeting outlining the expenditures of the FY 2023 funds to date.”

I am pleased to report that the SEFSC is considering the stated priorities in its budget for FY2024 appropriation of funds. At this point, however, we cannot commit to covering the costs for all vessels selected for coverage. SEFSC is working on the sample selection protocols which will provide a range of options from equal to the previous 10 years up to full coverage. Depending on which option meets current and future potential needs, in light of the ongoing biological opinions for smalltooth sawfish and giant manta rays, the total number of selected vessels could be higher than available funds can support. SEFSC will explore the possibility of including the early adopter vessels in the initial selection, however the initial selection will be determined based on statistical sampling considerations.

There is an important caution the SEFSC wishes to bring to your attention. It should be made clear with the IPT that including this requirement as part of the VMS program would give the Gulf shrimp industry access to the VMS reimbursement program, where setting up a separate SEFSC data pathway would eliminate that option and leave the cost of units for selected vessels to the industry if they aren't included in the early adopter program.

The SEFSC plans to have a staff member to make the presentation regarding the FY2023 funding as requested.

Sincerely,



John F Walter for Clay Porch

Clay Porch, Ph.D.
Director

cc: Gulf Council Staff, John Walter, Andy Strelcheck, John McGovern, Frank Helies, Shrimp AP, Larry Massey