

Shrimp Advisory Panel Summary
Gulf Council Office
Tampa, Florida
March 4, 2025

The meeting of the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf) Fishery Management Council's (Council) Shrimp Advisory Panel (AP) was convened at 8:30 AM EST on March 4, 2025. The agenda for this meeting and the meeting summary from December 16, 2024, were approved as written. Quorum was reached during Agenda Item IV (Council Actions in Response to Motions from the December 2024 Shrimp AP Meeting).

Council Actions in Response to Motions from the December 2024 Shrimp AP Meeting

Council staff presented on the Council's actions in response to the motions from the December 2024 Shrimp AP meeting. He also summarized motions from the January 2025 Council meeting on the draft Framework Action to modify vessel position data collection program. An AP member stated that the response from NMFS regarding how the Congressional FY24 appropriation of \$850,000 would be spent was limited and did not necessarily answer the three requests in the Council's letter from April 2024. The AP member also stated the FY24 \$850,000 had not been released from the agency to assist with the Early Adopter Program. The AP Chair requested that the administrative cost estimates that she provided during Public Testimony at the January 2025 Council meeting be emailed to the Shrimp AP members. She noted that updated cost information from the Office of Law Enforcement and any other agencies, not just from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC), associated with the alternatives in the draft Framework Action had been requested by the Council in the form of a motion. The AP Chair inquired when the mailout letter would be sent, which would notify permitholders of the preferred alternative in the draft Framework Action. Council staff responded that it would be mailed by the end of the week¹ and would include information on how to provide public comment via email and through the online comment form. The mailout to permit holders also notified them of the virtual public hearing webinar on Monday, March 31, 2025. The AP Chair expressed concern that it may be a short turnaround for permitholders to receive the letter prior to the virtual public hearing and the April Council meeting. Council staff noted that there is also a public testimony portion that would occur on the afternoon of Wednesday, April 9, 2025, before taking final action on the Shrimp Framework Action.

Update on the Number of Valid and Renewable Federal Gulf Shrimp Permits

Mr. Records (SERO staff) presented information on the number of valid and renewable federal Gulf shrimp permits, after reviewing the provisions in Shrimp Amendment 17B which establishes a reserve pool for federal Gulf shrimp permits after the minimum threshold number of 1,072 permits is reached. Mr. Records noted that the review panel trigger to discuss establishing a reserve pool, could be reached as soon as 2027. He added that offshore landings from 2016 to

¹ The mailout letters were sent on March 4, 2025.

2023 are well below the aggregate optimum yield. He noted that, while effort has generally decreased from 2016 to 2023, catch-per-unit-effort (CPUE) has generally increased over that same period, potentially indicating improved stock productivity of penaeid shrimp, better fishing methods, and/or the exit of less efficient vessels. He stated that active participation rates have not improved, and market conditions, rising operational costs, and natural disasters were noted as likely factors influencing participation rates.

Mr. Records recommended the Council reconsider the minimum threshold of permits for a reserve pool, if the federal Gulf shrimp permit moratorium is extended, using updated participation, landings, effort, biological, and economic data. He also suggested periodic updates on the permit count, particularly as it approaches 1,175, at which point a review panel would need to be convened. An AP member inquired if the review panel was constrained solely to consideration of a Reserve Pool. Mr. Records and Council staff responded that their interpretation from Shrimp Amendment 17B of “other management measures” was that the review panel could consider options beyond a reserve pool. Council staff noted that updated stock assessment from SEDAR 87 may provide new information on optimum yield and that would need to be considered if changes to the minimum threshold of permits are to be made.

Update on the Economics of the Federally-permitted Gulf Shrimp Fleet

Dr. Liese (SEFSC staff) reviewed the economics of the federally-permitted Gulf shrimp fleet. He noted that the U.S. shrimp market had continued to increase in both pounds and in total value since 1972, but the Gulf shrimp fishery has held a decreasing percentage of that market, in relation to imports. He stated that the mean, inflation-adjusted price per pound of imported and Gulf shrimp since 1984 have shown a general decline over time. He commented that the average annual net cash flow for the active federally-permitted Gulf shrimp fleet in the two most recent years (2022-2023) was negative. Dr. Liese noted that shrimp smaller than 25 count (size category) comprised 63% of imports in 2023, reflecting a shift in recent years to larger shrimp. He added that, from 2020 to 2022, Gulf shrimp prices exceeded import shrimp prices in several of the large size categories.

An AP member inquired about the number of observations from the survey and if it included both the inshore and offshore federally permitted fleet. Dr. Liese stated that, beginning in 2006, the sample was determined from the federal Gulf shrimp permits. He noted that distribution between shrimping inshore and offshore had not been examined. He added that the sample was stratified across states. Dr. Liese noted that inactive vessels were included in the number of observations and that inactive vessels were more likely to have economic losses. The AP member commented that there were significant differences across the brown, white, and pink shrimp fisheries and that the presentation blended all three species in the economic information conveyed. Another AP member inquired if the average of both uninsured and insured vessels is taken for an industry representation. Dr. Liese confirmed that statement. The AP member also noted that some vessels did not shrimp last year but still had costs associated with their vessels.

An AP member shared that, with the recent hurricanes in the Gulf, he has been spending monies on vessel repairs and that dock problems exist too. He stated that, for the past 50 years, he has made money shrimping and is optimistic that the shrimp industry will rebound. He noted that he has had

problems recently getting their shrimp permits renewed. Another AP member noted that the import data is for frozen shell-on and asked if peeled meat could be added to future presentations, which would be reflective of smaller size shrimp like popcorn shrimp. The AP member commented that the prices (per pound) of Gulf shrimp show that, over the past 40 years, shrimpers are bringing in less money for their harvest, but over the same period, operational costs have gone up. An AP member added that graphs of some of the presented information, such as prices by size of shrimp imports, may convey that information more easily to politicians.

An AP member discussed the age of vessels and that any new vessel built must be built to U.S. Coast guard class requirements which is cost prohibitive for the shrimp fishery. Thus, the average year the shrimp vessels in the sample were built remains within 1988 to 1990 over the past 10 years of data presented to the AP today. Another AP member added that the Coast Guard's regulations were intended for safety purposes but has hamstrung the industry with older vessels due to the economic status of the Gulf shrimp fishery. An AP member inquired when 2024 data would be available. Dr. Liese responded that those analyses would not be available until the end of the 2025 calendar year.

Another AP member inquired how landings are compiled. He also asked how prices of shrimp imports are determined. Dr. Liese stated that the prices are provided by U.S. Customs by country of origin and by product form. He noted that size category is not available for all product forms. Dr. Liese stated that the Annual Landings Form is used to collect data by species for each year, and he cross-references that with landings from trip tickets. The AP member stated that, with the economics of the Gulf shrimp industry, it makes no sense for anyone to build a new shrimp vessel. He stated that turtle excluder devices and bycatch reduction devices are also crippling the Gulf shrimp industry.

An AP member noted Dr. Liese's statement that the multifactor productivity index from the presentation tracks well with abundance. She noted that landings do not necessarily track with shrimp abundance, but more so with the economics of the industry. Dr. Liese responded that the multifactor productivity index examines pounds of shrimp harvested in relation to days of labor and gallons of fuel.

Discussion of Potential Expiration of Moratorium for Federal Gulf Shrimp Permits

Council staff inquired if the AP would like to make a recommendation to the Council for staff to begin development of a document extending the federal Gulf shrimp permit moratorium from Shrimp Amendment 17A, which is set to expire in October 2026.

An AP member inquired if there would be enough time for a plan amendment to be in place before October 2026. Council staff responded that there should be enough time, following the April 2025 Council meeting, for the Council to take Final Action and have the regulation in place by National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). He noted that, although the expiration is more than a year away, starting the process now would be advisable, as completing a full amendment and transmitting it through the agency takes significant time. An AP member expressed interested in continuing the moratorium for another 10 years.

An AP member commented that tension exists in a determination between maintaining access and preventing consolidation. If too many permits are lost, the fishery could become highly lucrative for a small group, making re-entry difficult. At the same time, keeping the moratorium in place would ensure that those enduring current challenges can benefit if conditions improve. Another AP member emphasized the importance of keeping the process simple, noting that there are two distinct discussions: whether to extend the moratorium and for how long, and how to manage the permit pool. He suggested that these should be handled separately to avoid delays and ensure that the moratorium is addressed in time.

An AP member asked for verification that if the number of federal Gulf shrimp permits fell by 1,072, then permits would be banked in a reserve pool. Other AP members explained that the review panel would determine how the reserve pool would be established for permits that expire below the threshold of 1,072 permits. An AP member stated that the moratorium should be continued for another 10 years instead of 5 years, as expiration of the moratorium in 5 years would coincide around the same time as decisions would need to be made for a reserve pool. Council staff noted that the Council and AP could always revisit the moratorium if there was interest in removing it at a future date.

Motion: To recommend that the Council extend the moratorium on the issuance of federal Gulf commercial shrimp vessel permits for an additional 10 years.

Motion carried unanimously.

2023 Gulf Shrimp Fishery Landings

Dr. Lowther (SEFSC) noted that the trend for 2023 has not changed for pink shrimp, while having a slight increase for brown shrimp and a slight decrease for white shrimp. When reviewing total landings by geographic zone and shore type (inshore versus offshore), he noted that landings for brown shrimp are overwhelmingly offshore for statistical zones 18-21 off Texas. An AP member requested that future annual presentations include the numerical pounds of shrimp landed. The AP member also suggested that a tabular breakdown of pounds landed by species and by year, for future presentations, would be ideal in addition to the existing graphs. The AP member inquired if pink landings in statistical zones 10-12 was zero, as the scale of the graph made it hard to discern; she added that there are some vessels from Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi that shrimp off the west Florida coast and unload in their home state. Mr. Dettloff (SEFSC) noted that the graphs represent area of catch, not 'total landings by area' as the table title shows in the presentation. An AP member requested future presentations show both area of catch and total landings by area.

Biological Review of the 2024 Texas Closure

Dr. Lowther presented on the 2024 Texas Closure. He showed the landings in August and in July for both offshore brown shrimp and offshore white shrimp in Texas. He noted that offshore white shrimp in Texas showed an uptick for both August and July in 2024, compared with 2023. Of the three regions, Upper Texas continues to have the largest share of landings in May through August from 2016 to 2024. Compared to Lower Texas, Middle Texas has had a slightly higher share of landings in May through August from 2016-2024.

An AP member noted that shrimp caught right after the Texas closure ends is often not landed until August. He requested future graphs overlay trends of landings as well as price. Another AP member requested Dr. Lowther review previous March presentations to the Shrimp AP, from around 2015 or 2016. The AP member then commented that the landings for offshore white shrimp in Texas were identical for August and July in both 2023 and 2024, and she stated that was peculiar. Dr. Lowther responded that he would check that data to confirm.² Another AP member inquired what ‘offshore’ referred to in the presentation. Dr. Lowther responded it was from the COLREGs³, so it was inshore and offshore landings.

An AP member noted that each year is different with the Texas Closure, but he added that the Texas Closure is doing what it is intended to do. Another AP member stated that the Texas Closure is more important now than when it first began. He added that he would be interested in the Texas industry’s response to extending the Texas Closure for a longer period.

Motion: To recommend that the Council request NMFS to continue the federal Texas Closure in conjunction with the state of Texas closure in 2025.

Motion carried unanimously.

Review of 2023 Royal Red Landings

Dr. Lowther reviewed the royal red shrimp landings from 1977 to 2023, relative to the annual catch limit (ACL). He noted that some data gaps exist in the graph, as there may only be two vessels or two dealers in certain years, so landings in those years can’t be reported due to confidentiality. He stated that a downward trend in royal red shrimp landings has been observed over the past decade and that the ACL has not been approached since 2002.

An AP member inquired if there are effort data on the royal red fishery and if CPUE could be generated. Mr. Dettloff noted that cellular electronic logbooks (cELBs) are on some of the royal red shrimp vessels, but confidentiality concerns may arise. He stated that CPUE is included in his presentation (Agenda Item XI). Another AP member requested information on where landings occur for royal red shrimp, either by port or by state. Dr. Lowther responded that, unless all three processors from 2023 were in the same state or stat zone, they would be unable to report on that information due to confidentiality. An AP member commented that harvest primarily occurs east of the Mississippi River.

2023 Gulf Shrimp Fishery Effort and Species-Specific Shrimp Effort Estimates

Mr. Dettloff presented on the Gulf shrimp fishery effort estimates for 2023. He noted a slight further decrease from the threshold for shrimp landings in statistical zones 10-21 for depths of 10-

² Dr. Lowther responded later to Council staff that the points appear identical in the graphs, but that they are numerically distinct.

³ Convention on the International Regulations for Preventing Collisions at Sea, 1972. In the U.S., the COLREGs demarcation line separates Inland Rules from International Rules and generally follows the coastline, running along bays, rivers, and inlets — it’s defined by specific coordinates listed in 33 CFR Part 80.

30 fathoms, which is monitored for juvenile red snapper interactions, from 2022 to 2023. He added that overall landings were down as well in 2023, compared to 2022. An AP member inquired what the landings in the 2023 stratified offshore estimates represents. Mr. Dettloff stated that it was total offshore landings, so it represents landings in state and federal waters. The AP member inquired if the table shows tow days extrapolated for the entire fleet, not the tow days from the cELB equipped vessels. Mr. Dettloff confirmed that.

Another AP member stated that he had maps from the SEFSC for harvest of the different shrimp species in the Gulf, and he commented that the maps suggested royal red shrimp harvest was all east of the Mississippi River. Mr. Dettloff suggested that the maps may be based on where landings were reported, whereas the effort reported in his presentation was based on the fine scale cELB pings. The AP member responded that the maps specifically referred to being based on cELB data and that he could share those with the AP Chair to potentially share with SEFSC staff. Another AP member commented that a trip might have begun with harvest of brown shrimp west of the Mississippi River and continued into deeper waters east of the Mississippi River to harvest royal red shrimp, and it may be difficult to parse out where the landings of those species occurred. An AP member added that there are vessels that leave from Texas and go to west Florida to harvest pink shrimp, which could account for high landings of pink shrimp being recorded in Texas. Another AP member commented that pink shrimp do exist off Texas, but those pink shrimp are a sub-species. Mr. Dettloff clarified, for split trips that include royal red shrimp, that only the effort within the royal red shrimp depth zone is classified as royal red and will not include effort from mixed trips. An AP member noted that the landings data in this presentation, particularly for pink shrimp, did not seem to match the landings data presented in Agenda Item VIII (2023 Gulf Shrimp Fishery Landings).

Mr. Dettloff stated that a marked decline in Gulf total offshore effort has occurred in recent years. He stated that most of that decline appears to be driven primarily by brown shrimp landings, followed by white shrimp landings; landings of pink shrimp have only had a subtle decline. An AP member inquired if there was a list of which vessels have cELBs and if it was public information. SEFSC staff stated that there is a list, but it is not public information. He stated that the total number of vessels with cELBs is 394.

Status of SD Card Returns

Dr. Lowther presented an update on the Secure Digital (SD) card returns since 3G transmission ceased with cELBs. He noted that, from 2021 to 2024, 44% to 52% of returned SD cards have had 20% or more of the pings with a bad date or GPS location information. From 2021 to 2024, an increasing number of SD cards have been returned with blank data. An AP member requested that the industry be thanked in future presentations for providing monies and personnel to assist in a 'boots on the ground' approach. Another AP member asked if the SD cards could be color-coded to help them remember which one needs to be returned, so they do not return a new SD card, which would have blank data. An AP member stated that there was already a mark on the SD cards to assist with that. Another AP member noted that returned SD cards with no data may be representative of vessels that are not actively shrimping for that period. An AP member confirmed that he was aware of that occurring with Gulf shrimpers. Dr. Lowther stated that there is a feedback card that can be noted that no shrimping occurred and returned along with the SD card.

Update on Early Adopter Program

Dr. Putman (LGL Ecological Associates) presented an update on the Early Adopter Program for cellular vessel monitoring system (cVMS) units on vessels with a federal Gulf shrimp permit. He reviewed communications materials to advertise the Early Adopter Program and stated that the expectation is that the three cVMS units through the Early Adopter Program would be appropriate for use in either Alternative 2 or Preferred Alternative 3 in the current Shrimp Framework Action. He stated that roughly 112 requests for installations are for vessels that have cELB units onboard. An AP member commented that this provides good overlap between the old sample frame and the sample frame currently being implemented. Dr. Putman stated that they have installed 120 cVMS units as of February 26, 2025, and that they anticipate installation of another 180 cVMS units.

An AP member asked if the data from the 120 installed cVMS units were going into the effort estimation database. Dr. Lowther responded that the dataset from cELBs is not currently being supplemented with the data from the Early Adopter Program, but that it will soon be. The AP member inquired when LGL's share of the \$850,000 from the FY24 appropriation would be released. Dr. Lowther responded that the delay should soon be resolved. The AP member inquired how long it would be for the additional 180 units to be installed, once the funds were released to LGL. Dr. Putman responded that everything should be operational by August 2027, with the additional 180 cVMS units installed by roughly July 2026. The AP member asked if anything can be done either to install the units faster or to shorten the period from installation to having everything operationalized. Dr. Putman responded that bottlenecks occur with coordinating with shrimpers for installation and with trying to coordinate multiple installations at the same time in the same geographic area.

Another AP member inquired if the percentage of cVMS installations could be compared with active permits. Dr. Gloeckner (SEFSC) stated that they could work with LGL to coordinate that type of information and for additional sampling from the waiting list for installations. The AP member inquired if data from the cVMS units can be transmitted from the vendors to a NMFS cloud-based server at this point. Dr. Lowther responded in the affirmative for two of the three vendors.

SERO Protected Resources Sea Turtle Updates, Sea Turtle Take and TED Compliance

Ms. Lee (SERO) presented sea turtle updates, including updates requested by the Shrimp AP, along with sea turtle population status and trends, proposed green sea turtle critical habitat, and monitoring of the April 2021 biological opinion. Only four sea turtles⁴ were reported captured by the shrimp fleet in the Gulf in 2024 across 1,051 observed sea days out of over 40,000 industry sea days in the Gulf. Ms. Lee stated that these captures are still considered rare and are usually the function of turtle excluder device (TED) malfunctions or improper installations. Related, in 2024, there were 74 TED-related incidents reported by the NOAA office of Law Enforcement, which

⁴ A numerical discrepancy was noted during the presentation on whether four or five sea turtle captures may have been reported in the Gulf.

Ms. Lee did not think was much different from previous years. Ms. Lee added that many TED tears and damage are reported to be from increasing shark interactions in recent years. She also reviewed the installation of the Chauvin Shrimp Deflector, which has been a common compliance issue. Sea turtle stocks are all showing improving nesting trends except for leatherbacks, with which the shrimp fleet does not interact. All species remain either endangered or threatened. In July 2023, NOAA and the US Fish and Wildlife Service proposed to designate critical habitat for green sea turtles, for which many public comments were received; however, rulemaking regarding these areas is still pending. Lastly, Ms. Lee noted that there is no information to suggest that sea turtle takes have been exceeded per the April 2021 biological opinion. An update to this biological opinion is expected in June 2025, which will be prepared using data from the previous 10 years.

An AP member expressed confusion how a green sea turtle was found dead by an observer in 2024 in a standard net with no TED. Another AP member inquired if an updated Shrimp Biological Opinion would be prepared by 2026. Ms. Lee confirmed this. The AP member asked what the terminal year of data would be. Ms. Lee responded that 2020 would be the terminal year.

Council staff asked for clarification that future fisheries effort monitoring must be conducted at equivalent (or greater) levels as conducted over the past 10 years, ending in April 2021. Ms. Lee responded that it would likely entail a period of 2011-2021. An AP member commented that the population trend for most sea turtles is increasing, stating that the shrimping industry has done their part to rebuild the populations, and she added that more focus needs to be placed on protection of nesting habitat in order for rebuilding to be fully successful. Another AP member stated that sea turtles are easily hooked and that the recreational fishing sector does more damage to sea turtles than the shrimping industry. An AP member inquired about nesting habitat in Mexico. Ms. Lee responded that they have had difficulty obtaining those numbers, as those numbers have not been released by the Mexican government.

New Bycatch Estimates and Other Analyses for Smalltooth Sawfish and/or Giant Manta Ray

Dr. Carlson (SEFSC) provided an update of the products, timeline, and status update for the bycatch estimates for smalltooth sawfish and giant manta ray. For smalltooth sawfish, a previously conducted population viability analysis (PVA) will be revised to include bycatch estimation data through 2023. Additionally, the updated PVA will incorporate the mass mortality event which affected adult and large juvenile smalltooth sawfish in the Florida Keys in 2024. The giant manta ray PVA will similarly be updated to include bycatch estimation information through 2023. The goals of the work include revising the PVAs, submitting the modeling for internal SEFSC review, and presenting the results to the Council's SSC at its May 2025 meeting.

An AP member inquired whether it would be possible to receive information on the PVA model including data inputs and assumptions. SEFSC staff indicated they could provide the peer-reviewed published journal article that detailed those modeling components; Dr. Carlson noted that an overview was given to the AP last year. An AP member recommended that the methodology for extrapolating sawfish bycatch in the shrimp fishery be presented in detail to the SSC since that analysis would substantially influence sawfish bycatch estimates in the fleet. Another AP member stressed the importance of industry input and suggested that analysts consult with industry to

ground truth model outputs when developing the PVAs. The current plan is to garner industry input through public comment at the May SSC meeting, at a future Council meeting, and in continued with collaboration with LGL during the project development. NMFS staff responded that they would continue to remain transparent when revising the PVAs and would provide extensive detail to the SSC and incorporate its feedback.

Additional Updates for Giant Manta Ray and Sawfish, and BiOp Updates

SERO Protected Resources staff presented on reinitiation of the shrimp consultation. New information included giant manta ray and smalltooth sawfish recovery planning updates, review of trends in juvenile sawfish abundance in Charlotte Harbor, a summary of the 2024 Florida Keys sawfish mortality event, and an update on the Section 7 (of the Endangered Species Act) consultation progress for sawfish and giant manta ray.

An AP member asked for clarification about indices of sawfish abundance and specifically referenced a recreational creel survey conducted in Everglades National Park. The AP member further noted that creel survey, which has been conducted since the 1970s, has indicated a 5% per year increase in abundance of smalltooth sawfish from 1989 – 2004. in contrast to some of the fishery independent surveys which have shown declines over time. NMFS staff responded that all data streams will be considered when considering smalltooth sawfish population estimates but contended that stratified random sampling in a fishery independent program was considered more robust than a recreational creel survey in small geographic area. For the work being conducted in Charlotte Harbor, an AP member asked why the estimate for the number of juveniles had such high variation in 2010. SEFSC staff replied that uncertainty about that estimate was high because it was the first year of the time series and that year also represented an abnormally cold weather event that resulted in a high number of juvenile sawfish mortalities.

An AP member asked for some clarification on the pupping behavior of sawfish. SERO staff replied that female sawfish birth pups in the estuarine areas within proximity to red mangroves but do not reside in those areas very long. Another AP member asked about the cause for the recent mortality event in the Florida Keys, and SERO staff replied that necropsy results indicated that it was likely a result of benthic algae releasing toxins. An AP member highlighted the significant number of recreational interactions in the core habitat for juvenile smalltooth sawfish and noted that, in her opinion, protection from human disturbance of juvenile endangered sea turtle nesting habitat was very stringent while protection from human disturbance to juvenile smalltooth sawfish habitat seemed lenient. An AP member asked if release mortality from recreational fishing had been incorporated in the population viability analysis (PVA). SEFSC staff indicated that release mortality was included in the PVA and was indirectly estimated based on the observed release mortality of other elasmobranch species.

The AP acknowledged that loss of critical habitat should be considered in sawfish recovery and asked if that was being quantified. SERO staff replied that, when a project undergoes a Section 7 consultation, NMFS does record any habitat that may be removed as a result of that project and compares those loss to what habitat was available when critical habitat was designated in 2009. An AP member asked if any project had been denied due to adversely affecting sawfish critical habitat, and SERO staff replied no project had been stopped for that reason. Another AP member

noted that although the recovery plan acknowledges habitat loss as a threat to rebuilding, the plan then goes on to score each individual threat based on how easy it will be to regulate that activity and this produces a higher emphasis on implementing commercial fishing regulations as opposed to regulations for other activities. An AP member asked if that report would receive independent review, and SERO staff indicated it would not. The AP recommended that SERO involve industry when revising the recovery plan.

An AP member asked if using a captain communication network would be feasible as a take reduction approach for giant manta rays. He continued that this method has been successful for marine mammal species and could be applied to reduce takes of giant manta rays in the shrimp fishery. SERO staff replied that any input by industry would be considered to reduce giant manta ray bycatch. The AP member also asked if it was possible to consider regional effects when a protected species does not have a distinctive population structure which is the case for giant manta ray. He contended that the Gulf shrimp fishery should not be affected by fishing morality occurring in other parts of the world. SERO staff replied that they are required to manage to the listed entity; however, the consultation process does focus on regional areas when considering protected species interactions.

Update on Gulf Shrimp Stock Assessment (SEDAR 87)

Dr. Stevens (SEFSC) updated the AP on the SEDAR 87 stock assessment for Gulf brown, pink, and white shrimp. The data workshop was held in September 2023, and the assessment process has been conducted via webinars from fall 2024 through spring 2025. The Review Workshop will be held in June 2025 at the Council office in Tampa, Florida. Dr. Stevens summarized the progression of the model building exercises that have been completed to-date. SEDAR 87 is expected to be reviewed by the Gulf SSC in fall 2025, with the results thereafter being considered by the Council. Council staff asked about the long-term possibility for annual updating of these shrimp stock assessments. Dr. Stevens replied that annual updates were likely possible. The AP was briefed on the in-person review workshop, which will be open to the public and held in Tampa from June 23 – 27, 2025. The reviewers will include members of the Center for Independent Experts who are proficient in the modeling environments used to assess the Gulf shrimp stocks. Council staff reviewed the progression of scientific and management review once the completed stock assessment is delivered to the Council, which is currently expected in August 2025. AP members discussed catch restrictions regarding annual shrimp fisheries, expressing concern about the potential for misunderstandings regarding how stock assessments for shrimp are expected to be handled in contrast to finfish stocks. Council staff added that it is the Council's responsibility to recommend management measures that are expected to prevent overfishing, and it is the responsibility of NMFS to prevent overfishing on all managed stocks.

Motion: The AP requests the Council not to use the results of the SEDAR 87 stock assessments for brown, white, or pink shrimp to establish a harvest control rule or any form of catch restrictions given these are annual species covered by the Magnuson-Stevens Act exception from annual catch limits, unless a fishery for such species is subject to overfishing.

Motion carried without opposition.

Revised Administrative Costs for Draft Shrimp Framework Action

Dr. Gloeckner (SEFSC) gave an overview of the letter from the SEFSC to the Council in response to the Council's request for updated administrative costs with the draft Shrimp Framework Action. He noted a cost reduction of \$100,000 for the data interface for the Office of Law Enforcement (OLE). He stated that the vendor approval and testing cost per unit had been clarified. Dr. Porch (SEFSC) added that an independent VMS program would cost more than using an existing VMS program. He commented that administration of the VMS program would transition from OLE to the Office of Science and Technology. He acknowledged that OLE can still request access to the VMS data and that data cannot be withheld from OLE. An AP member asked where the data would be transmitted to when it leaves the unit aboard the vessel. The SEFSC responded that the data would be transmitted to the catcher's mitt that has been set up by the OLE; however, that program would not be run by OLE anymore, but rather administered by the Office of Science and Technology (S&T). An AP member asked for further clarification as to whether the transition to S&T would mean law enforcement would no longer have blanket access to view VMS data, and instead law enforcement would only have access to VMS data on a case-by-case basis. Dr. Porch responded that he was uncertain whether OLE would only have access on a case-by-case basis, and he noted that, even if a system was set up at the SEFSC, they could not refuse requests for access from OLE. An AP member disputed that the systems would not be different under S&T versus the SEFSC and then asked for clarification why the letter was received just prior to the meeting agenda item, which prevented AP members from reviewing it ahead of time. Dr. Porch responded that firing of all probationary employees along with retirement of employees delayed development of the letter, and he noted that there was also an extra level of approval required. The AP member stated that, under Alternative 2, the government reimburses fishermen for the cost of VMS devices, but this government cost for the units is not listed as an administrative cost (to the government) in either the SEFSC letter or the Framework Action. Dr. Gloeckner responded that the reimbursement is a subsidy that has already been budgeted and would not be an incremental cost if a VMS program was implemented for the federal Gulf shrimp fleet. An AP member recalled that the VMS reimbursement program is funded at \$250,000 annually for the entire nation and that OLE previously informed the Shrimp AP they would need to request additional funding to cover the cost of shrimp VMS reimbursements in the event a VMS requirement was mandated. Dr. Gloeckner responded that the reimbursement is a subsidy and is not coming out of the OLE budget, and while it is a government cost, is not an incremental cost, which is what the focus is on. Council staff commented that it would be helpful if the technical specification process could be defrayed by the Early Adopter Program, since VMS devices from three vendors have already been approved by NMFS and are already onboard vessels. An AP member inquired why continuing the existing shrimp cELB program would require an increase in call center costs of \$250,000 per year when budgeted personnel on staff have been performing these duties for over a decade. The SEFSC responded that they will be shifting those personnel to duties outside of this program and, therefore, would require new dedicated personnel to support the program.

An AP member inquired about the \$890,000 in Congressional funding that has already been spent to lay the groundwork and infrastructure for continuing the shrimp cELB program through the SEFSC. Dr. Gloeckner responded that some of those funds did go to build a data repository and that some funds went to providing a process in which the Dettloff effort algorithm would run. An

AP member commented that duplicative systems are being implemented for other fisheries such as snapper where a VMS system capturing landings and effort data was already in place, but the SEFSC is currently implementing a ELB program for the snapper fishery that will require fishermen to enter this same data into a separate ELB platform managed by the SEFSC ELB program. Another AP member stated that a VMS program is an ankle bracelet. An AP member stated that this would cause shrimpers who are not even fishing to pay monthly transmission fees. Dr. Porch stated the existing cellular program is failing, that the SEFSC does not have any of the old 3G boxes to replace the failing units, and that they must calculate effort, so the only option is what will be run through S&T.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Other Business

No Other Business.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:25 pm eastern time on March 4, 2025.

Meeting Participants

Members Present:

Leann Bosarge, Chair
Steve Bosarge, Vice Chair
Glenn Delaney
Haley Gambill
Gary Graham
Dennis Henderson
Chris Londrie
Laura Picariello
Bob Zales

Council Staff:

Max Birdsong
Matt Freeman
John Froeschke
Beth Hager
Lisa Hollensead
Jessica Matos
Ryan Rindone
Bernie Roy
Camilla Shireman
Carrie Simmons
Verena Wang

NMFS Staff:

Adam Brame
Jesse Buntin
John Carlson
Kyle Dettloff
Meaghan Emory
Nick Farmer
David Gloeckner
Frank Helies
Calusa Horn
Kimberley Johnson
Jennifer Lee
Mara Levy
Christopher Liese
Alan Lowther
Michelle Masi
Larry Perruso
Clay Porch
David Records
Katie Siegfried
Rebecca Smith
Jessica Stephen
Molly Stevens
Brendan Turley

Kate Walter
John Walter
Jo Williams

Council Members:

Chris Schieble (representative)
Anthony Overton

Other Attendees:

Maria Barrera-Jaross

Taylor Beyea
Sonja Fordham
Jessica Pate
Nathan Putman
Olivia Regan
Elizabeth Scott-Denton
Jason Surma
Megan Westmeyer
John Williams