

DRAFT Workplan for Evaluating and Providing Feedback on Shrimp Bycatch Methodology for Finfish Species in the Gulf of America

**Objective of Workgroup**

This workgroup will have the following objectives:

- Review and evaluate the new proposed methodology for estimating bycatch from shrimp trawls for finfish in the Gulf of America.
- Assess the new estimators' applicability and use for upcoming stock assessments in priority order (i.e., red snapper, gray triggerfish, and king mackerel).
- Assess and reconfirm, as appropriate and applicable, that the Southeast Area Monitoring and Assessment Program (SEAMAP) index is the best proxy to use for shrimp trawl bycatch of finfish due to observer data limitations.
- Assess, discuss, and make recommendations on the validity of using proxies for other finfish species captured in the SEAMAP index.
- The working group should develop recommendations for the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) analyst or contractors to consider and provide feedback as to the methodologies' real-world applicability to the shrimp trawl fishery. These recommendations and any others that were applied from the desk Center for Independent Experts (CIE) reviews will be presented in a future presentation to the Standing and Special Shrimp Scientific and Statistical Committees (SSCs) for their final review.
- Address potential for data limitations (e.g., low observer coverage, seasonal data gaps, etc.) and how that could impact the uncertainty around the bycatch estimates for various finfish species.

The efforts from this working group will build the foundation for addressing the Council's request from its August 2025<sup>1</sup> meeting that was for a special working group to address bycatch of protected species. The aim of this working group would be to allow SSC member specialists and industry representatives to fully understand the updated bycatch methodologies for finfish. This will set the stage for the next steps of the process involving protected resources.

**Background and History of Efforts to Date**

In 2020, the Council supported the following four working groups for the Gulf shrimp fleet (i.e., shrimp life history/environmental data; SEAMAP; observer [bycatch methodology]; shrimp effort estimation) in preparation for the penaeid stock assessments for brown, pink, and white shrimp (Southeast Data Assessment and Review, SEDAR 87). The Council contributed staff and SSC members, and appointed shrimp industry representatives to this stock assessment process. Unfortunately, due to federal resource limitations the new effort estimation methodology was not completed in time for the working group to address bycatch methodology for finfish. The other shrimp working groups outlined above completed their work and provided recommendations for the upcoming assessments. Subsequently, the process for shrimp bycatch methodology for finfish was internalized by the SEFSC.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://gulf-council-media.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2025/10/A-4-August-2025-Full-Council-Minutes.pdf>

In 2021-2022, the SEFSC was restructured, and the responsibility for the Gulf shrimp fleet electronic monitoring program and observer program that were previously run by the SEFSC Galveston Laboratory moved to its Fisheries Statistics Division. At the same time, SEFSC staff with historical knowledge of the Gulf shrimp fishery, key data sources, and associated data processing and procedures required for estimating shrimp fishery bycatch of finfish were lost.

In September 2023, a contractor for the SEFSC from the Cooperative Institute for Marine and Atmospheric Studies (SEDAR98-RD-01, Dr. Steve Smith et al. 2023<sup>2</sup>) and other partners developed a working paper titled “Improving Estimation of Bycatch from Shrimp Trawls in the Gulf”. Unlike the Gulf-wide effort estimation methodology, the work by Smith et al. 2023 was never reviewed by the SSCs. However, two CIE desk reviews and reports (available [here](#) and [here](#)) were completed on this work but it is unclear exactly what recommendations the analysts were able to incorporate from the CIE reviews before it was applied to the next finfish assessments such as red snapper<sup>3</sup> and initial discussions for gray triggerfish.

During the May 2025 SSC meeting, Drs. Smith and Peterson presented bycatch methodologies for red snapper and a draft approach for gray triggerfish, as noted in the meeting summary (<https://gulf-council-media.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2025/05/Gulf-Standing-SSC-Summary-May-2025-05142025.pdf>). The SSCs made no recommendations on the red snapper shrimp trawl bycatch information. The methodology was presented to the SSCs virtually, and the Council and SSCs ask that the presentation be revisited in-person with more time on the agenda at a future SSC meeting.

Council staff recommends that before this information is considered again by the SSCs that a smaller working group of industry representatives, SEFSC observer program staff, and appropriate analytical expertise be convened. Methodologies and recommendations from the working group efforts will be presented to the SSCs for final guidance that will potentially impact all future Gulf finfish assessments.

### **Workgroup Composition**

The working group, in coordination with Council staff and other identified subject matter experts, is tasked with determining the agenda and background materials needed to make informed recommendations and provide feedback to SEFSC analysts and contractors. The recommendations from the working group will be considered by the SEFSC analysts and reported to the SSCs for final review and approval. The proposed workgroup composition is:

- 3 Special Shrimp SSC members
- 2-3 Standing SSC members
- 3 Shrimp industry representatives from the federal harvesting sector
- SEFSC staff knowledgeable of the Shrimp Observer Program and Bycatch Characterization
- SEFSC staff knowledgeable of SEAMAP fishery-independent indices
- SEFSC staff – TBD
- Gulf Council staff – Dr. John Froeschke (1)
- SERO Staff – TBD

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<sup>2</sup> <https://sedarweb.org/documents/sedar-98-rd01-improving-estimation-of-bycatch-from-shrimp-trawls-in-the-gulf-of-mexico/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://sedarweb.org/documents/sedar-98-dw-25-estimation-of-red-snapper-bycatch-from-gulf-of-america-shrimp-trawls/>

### **Workgroup Meetings**

The Council Executive Director, with Council Chair oversight, will secure working group appointments via memo request to SEFSC and via request for SSC member participation. A planning meeting will be held with working group members to discuss background materials, statement of work, and expected outcomes. The in-person meeting day(s) will be considered based on the planning webinar meeting. The in-person meeting will consist of working group and subject matter experts only. When the working group produces the final recommendations on shrimp bycatch methodologies, the SSCs will receive the draft guidance document for any final updates.

- Meeting #1: Planning meeting with working group. Gather feedback from members about the types of analyses they would like to see to inform the final guidance documents.
- Meeting #2: Hold in-person working group meeting.
- Report out to SSCs. Any final updates are considered and provided to the Council and SEDAR Coordinator and SEFSC analysts.
- This methodology for bycatch of finfish will be utilized to build on the Council's request from its August 2025 meeting asking for a special working group to address bycatch of protected species.

### **Potential Timeline**

- Virtual Planning Meeting - late 2025
- In-person meeting - late 2025 to early 2026
- Report out to SSCs. SEFSC analysts and contractors consider recommendations from Gulf SSC, and any final updates are considered and provided to the Council, SEDAR Coordinator, and SEFSC analysts.