

GULF COUNCIL

LAW ENFORCEMENT COMMITTEE

Hyatt Centric New Orleans, Louisiana

January 26, 2026

**VOTING MEMBERS**

- Joe Spraggins.....Mississippi
- Kevin Anson.....Alabama
- Billy Broussard.....Louisiana
- Dave Donaldson.....GSMFC
- Troy Frady.....Alabama
- Dakus Geeslin (designee for Robin Riechers).....Texas
- Lt. Jackson Morton.....USCG
- Jason Osborne.....Louisiana
- Anthony Overton.....Alabama
- Ed Walker.....Florida
- Chris Schieble (designee for Ryan Montegut).....Louisiana

**NON-VOTING MEMBERS**

- Mike Allen.....Florida
- Brenda Ballard.....Texas
- Kesley Banks.....Texas
- J.D. Dugas.....Louisiana
- John Marquez.....Louisiana
- John Sanchez.....Florida
- Andy Strelcheck.....NMFS
- C.J. Sweetman (designee for Jessica McCawley).....Florida

**STAFF**

- Assane Diagne.....Economist
- Matt Freeman.....Economic Analyst
- John Froeschke.....Deputy Director
- Sarah Gardiner.....Fishery Biologist
- Beth Hager.....Administrative Officer
- Lisa Hollensead.....Fishery Biologist
- Mara Levy.....NOAA General Counsel
- Jessica Matos.....Administrative Document Editor & IT Coordinator
- Emily Muehlstein.....Public Information Officer
- Ryan Rindone.....Lead Fishery Biologist & SEDAR Liaison
- Bernadine Roy.....Office Manager
- Carrie Simmons.....Executive Director
- Anabelle Suitor.....Social Scientist
- Verena Wang.....Ecosystem Analyst

1 **OTHER PARTICIPANTS**

2 Dean Aucoin.....LA  
3 Frank Helies.....NOAA  
4 John Walter.....SEFSC

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4 the Officer/Team of the Year nominations. [The motion carried on](#)  
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1 The Law Enforcement Committee of the Gulf Council convened at the  
2 Hyatt Centric in New Orleans, Louisiana on Monday morning, January  
3 26, 2026, and was called to order by Chairman Joe Spraggins.  
4

5 **ADOPTION OF AGENDA**  
6 **APPROVAL OF JANUARY 2025 MINUTES**  
7 **ACTION GUIDE AND NEXT STEPS**  
8

9 **CHAIRMAN JOE SPRAGGINS:** For the Law Enforcement Committee, first  
10 off, the members of the committee are myself as the chair, and Mr.  
11 Frady is the vice chair, Anson, Barata/Morton, Morton, Broussard,  
12 Donaldson, Schieble, Osborne, Overton, Geeslin, and Walker, and  
13 then our staff.  
14

15 All right, and so, first off, I would like the adoption of the  
16 agenda, if I could get an adoption of the agenda for the Law  
17 Enforcement Committee.  
18

19 **UNIDENTIFIED:** So moved.  
20

21 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** All right. Have I got a second?  
22

23 **MR. DAVE DONALDSON:** Second.  
24

25 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** All right. Any questions? The agenda  
26 adopted. All right. Then, second off, I need approval for the  
27 January 2025 minutes, if I could get a motion for that.  
28

29 **UNIDENTIFIED:** Motion.  
30

31 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Motion. Have we got a second?  
32

33 **UNIDENTIFIED:** Second.  
34

35 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** A second. Any questions? All right, and  
36 that's done, and now we're going to action guide, sir.  
37

38 **SUMMARY REPORT FROM THE OCTOBER 2025 LAW ENFORCEMENT TECHNICAL**  
39 **COMMITTEE**  
40

41 **DR. ASSANE DIAGNE:** Thank you, sir, and good morning. For the  
42 action guide, we have essentially one item here. We will discuss  
43 a summary report for the Law Enforcement Technical Committee  
44 meeting, which was held in October in Biloxi, Mississippi, and we  
45 have a list of items that we will cover here, starting with a  
46 discussion on the additional tier of ID for vessels and ending  
47 with a short discussion on the nomination process for Officer and  
48 Team of the Year. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

1  
2 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Is there any questions? All right.  
3 Let's move straight forward. I'm getting my ducks in a row here.  
4 Hang on. I've got some more paperwork than I've got anything else  
5 here. All right, and so we have no discussion on that. Is there  
6 any questions on the Item V?

7  
8 **DR. DIAGNE:** So I will now go ahead and then discuss the summary,  
9 Mr. Chair. The first item that was discussed during the meeting  
10 is about an additional tier of ID number size for federally-  
11 permitted vessels between twenty-five and sixty-five feet.

12  
13 As you recall, the council did request that the LETC revisit the  
14 issue and see whether they would make a different recommendation,  
15 and so, when we went to the meeting, we discussed the issue with  
16 the committee, and told them that essentially the council requested  
17 that they revisit the issue.

18  
19 The committee discussed the issue at length, and the General was  
20 present during the meeting, and did indicate that essentially a  
21 clear recommendation on what it is that the technical committee  
22 recommends would be needed to bring before the council.

23  
24 Some of the items that were mentioned during the discussion is  
25 that visibility from afar was key, essentially, in terms of vessel  
26 ID. The committee also noted that the current official number  
27 displays were useful in distinguishing the federal for-hire  
28 vessels from the other vessels.

29  
30 The committee also discussed, I mean, the increasing role that,  
31 let's say aircraft patrols and surveillance is taking, and  
32 indicated that the size of the number, if it were to be decreased,  
33 that would adversely impact the ability to identify the vessels  
34 from a distance, especially from the air. Considering all of these  
35 elements, the committee unanimously approved a resolution, which  
36 is a motion, I guess. Okay, and I will read that, and it's in  
37 front of us on the screen here.

38  
39 The LETC discussed the decal configurations and color schemes to  
40 allow for smaller number sizing. After discussion, the committee  
41 recommends the current sizing for official number displays  
42 adequate to assist in enforcement. The intent of the LETC is that  
43 the identifying display be of sufficient size and contrast to allow  
44 identification from a standard distance for law enforcement vessel  
45 and aircraft.

46  
47 So, at the end of the day, they did discuss the issue, but the  
48 recommendation that they made initially still stands when it comes

1 to the official numbering and the display. Thank you.

2  
3 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Any questions on law enforcement, as  
4 far as the identification of the numbers and letters? Do we need  
5 a motion to accept this? I kind of didn't think so. Okay. All  
6 right. Well, thank you very much, and we can -- Unless there's  
7 any other discussion on the ID side of the meeting, we'll move to  
8 the next one.

9  
10 **DR. DIAGNE:** Mr. Chair, you have a question over there.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Sorry. Go ahead.

13  
14 **MR. ANDY STRELCHECK:** Yes, and so I'm not on your committee. I  
15 guess what I'm missing from this, and what still concerns me, is  
16 that there's a considerable size jump between the smaller vessels  
17 and these mid-sized vessels.

18  
19 I fully respect law enforcement and get, obviously, the rationale  
20 here, in terms of why they would want to maintain those sizes of  
21 decals, or lettering, but I guess my question is, is there still  
22 an opportunity where we can have like a graduated size increase  
23 commensurate with the size of the vessel, because that's really  
24 the main problem, is that a twenty-five-foot vessel has to have  
25 the same lettering on it that a sixty-five-foot vessel has on it.

26  
27 I just wanted to mention that, because that was the concerns and  
28 complaints I was getting from charter captains when we were really  
29 actively working to enforce this, and it seems like there might be  
30 still a happy medium that could assist law enforcement, but also  
31 address some of the concerns of the fishermen.

32  
33 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, Mr. Strelcheck, and I would mention that Major  
34 Aucoin is in the room, and he may have some remarks to add to this.  
35 The committee did consider that, but, at the end of the day, I  
36 mean, this is the recommendation they made, and so maybe Major  
37 Aucoin could add some context to this.

38  
39 **MAJOR DEAN AUCOIN:** Yes, and thank you, council, for having us  
40 today. We did talk about the number and size heavily, and it goes  
41 back to -- It all ultimately came back to the aerial support,  
42 whether it's us with drones, for instance for us, and the Coast  
43 Guard was big on this with the helicopters. When you start talking  
44 about the size numbers, and getting down to gradual, on a smaller  
45 vessel, it's still hard to depict what size you go to.

46  
47 That's why it was decided to stick with one size across-the-board  
48 for the permit, versus having tiered sizes, because on a -- You

1 know, if it's five-inch block, or six-inch block, or seven -- It  
2 just -- It gets harder, from an aerial side, to really determine  
3 are those numbers that much bigger than if somebody put a three-  
4 inch number, and does that make sense?

5  
6 That's kind of where we landed. It came back down to aerial  
7 support. A lot of us have transitioned to being efficient with  
8 aerial support, whether it's drones or helicopters, and that's  
9 where it ultimately landed, is just a universal one set number  
10 across-the-board.

11  
12 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Any questions for the Major? Captain  
13 Walker.

14  
15 **MR. ED WALKER:** But it's -- I think the issue is still there, and  
16 so, on a smaller vessel, they aren't required to have those big  
17 numbers, and, now, what does that mean for aerial and drone, and  
18 I think that's what we're talking about here.

19  
20 **MAJOR AUCOIN:** Are you talking about on the less than twenty-five,  
21 on the smaller one? Yes, you're correct, and so, again, law  
22 enforcement, when we look at it, we're saying what signifies the  
23 difference in the permit side, because we had talked about -- We  
24 brought up all kinds of ideas. It's not like this was a five-  
25 minute discussion.

26  
27 We talked about different colored placards, and we talked about  
28 different colored decals, and then the size of the decal, and we  
29 got into color discussion, and started talking about, well, how  
30 big does it really have to be for us to talk about aerial, and so  
31 that's where the committee landed on itself, of just keeping the  
32 current resolution, or keeping it where it is, as the same size on  
33 the boats that are required to have it, and so that was our  
34 recommendation to you all for that.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Mara.

37  
38 **MS. MARA LEVY:** Well, just a question, because, looking at the  
39 regulations, are we talking about the vessel identification  
40 regulations that are at 622.6? I just want to be clear what we're  
41 talking about, because those regulations do have a graduated size  
42 increase, right, and so three inches for vessels twenty-five feet  
43 long or less, ten inches over twenty-five feet, and then eighteen  
44 inches for vessels over sixty-five feet, and so I just want to be  
45 clear that it's not one size for every vessel size.

46  
47 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Yes, and you're correct, and it is a -- It's  
48 not -- I guess what we were talking about, I think, the best I can

1 remember, and, Major, you can help me here, but, the best I can  
2 remember in the conversation, it was did we go twenty-five to  
3 thirty-five, thirty-five to forty-five, forty-five to fifty-five,  
4 and that, and we decided that that was not needed for that. Is  
5 that correct?  
6

7 **MAJOR AUCOIN:** Yes, sir, and, like I said, several ideas came out,  
8 of different color codes and everything. At the end of the day,  
9 the committee landed as, in the current format, we prefer it that  
10 way on the bigger vessels, to have the bigger numbers for  
11 identification. It all came down to aerial support, ultimately.  
12

13 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Mr. Strelcheck, I think you had your hand up.  
14

15 **MR. STRELCHECK:** You've answered it. Thank you.  
16

17 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Any further discussion? Yes, sir, Mr.  
18 Walker.  
19

20 **MR. WALKER:** I mean, not to beat a dead horse here, and I'm not  
21 going to die on this hill, but, you know, if a charter vessel is  
22 -- If there were some medium size that could be delved out, it  
23 would still be at least two-times bigger than the non-charter  
24 vessel, and that seems like it would aid in drones and air support  
25 and distance. You know, that's really what I was hoping to come  
26 to in all this, and, as Mara said, it is a graduated size increase.  
27

28 It's not a one-size-fits-all, and so I think we were just looking.  
29 I mean, the committee seems like they don't think there was a place  
30 for a middle size in this graduated system. That's what we were  
31 after, but I appreciate your input anyway.  
32

33 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Any further questions? Once again,  
34 from listening to the Law Enforcement Committee, you know, I came  
35 in with the idea you did. I said why don't we do -- You know, if  
36 it's this size for twenty-five, make it this size for thirty-five,  
37 and this size on up, but they convinced me that this was the best  
38 for them, and they're the ones that is, you know, enforcing what  
39 we need to do, and it was better off for them, and it was everything  
40 from the aerial, and so we agreed to do that. Any other questions?  
41 Major, do you have anything else additional?  
42

43 **MAJOR AUCOIN:** No, sir.  
44

45 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Well, then I think we're fine with  
46 that. We don't have to have any motions or anything, but we're  
47 fine, and we can move forward.  
48

1 **DR. DIAGNE:** All right. Thank you, sir, and so the next item that  
2 was discussed during the meeting was essentially an update on the  
3 twenty-fathom boundary line closure, and this was essentially just  
4 informing the LETC that the council has selected a preferred  
5 alternative in Amendment 62 to essentially eliminate the February  
6 1 to March 31 recreational closed season for shallow-water grouper  
7 in federal waters seawards of the twenty-fathom boundary.

8  
9 The LETC just appreciated the information, essentially, and  
10 concurred with the council's decision, but didn't have any  
11 additional action to recommend relative to that, and so that was  
12 the second item. It was just sharing information with them.

13  
14 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Any questions on it? You must be doing  
15 good.

16  
17 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, and it may be that we'll also give back a few  
18 minutes. The third item had to do with the state and federal  
19 boundary line for reef fish and Dr. Froeschke here may have some  
20 comments to add to that, and he led a discussion, a short  
21 discussion, on the boundary between state and federal waters for  
22 reef fish management in the Gulf and asked the committee whether  
23 the boundary line resulted in any enforcement challenges for them  
24 as drawn at the time.

25  
26 The committee did indicate that currently there was no enforcement  
27 issues that they could identify, but, subsequently, I mean, Dr.  
28 Froeschke did follow up with NOAA staff to resolve any potential  
29 ambiguity, and NOAA staff did indicate that they have developed a  
30 map that essentially gives a very clear contour, if you would, of  
31 that boundary line, and that map was provided to the council, and  
32 Dr. Froeschke did include it in the background material for this  
33 meeting, and I'll let him say a few words on this, if need be.

34  
35 **DR. JOHN FROESCHKE:** Thanks, and so just a couple of brief  
36 comments. I did provide a map in there. We worked with SERO staff  
37 to make sure that we have everything gone through and correct, and  
38 so this resulted from 2016, through the Appropriations Act, and it  
39 was reef fish management was extended from three to nine nautical  
40 miles in Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi.

41  
42 In 2017, that was finalized, and made permanent, for lack of a  
43 better word, I think, and so this map is -- We're just following  
44 up to ensure that there's a common set of guidance for everyone,  
45 that we know where this boundary is.

46  
47 On the map that you see here, what I tried to do is we overlaid  
48 the darker continuous line, and that's the nine-mile reef fish

1 boundary, and not CMP, and then like, for example, if you look off  
2 Louisiana, there's a polygon, and that sort of overlays the outer  
3 edge of where Louisiana was considering their boundary. There's  
4 a couple areas where it's a little bit different. There's a couple  
5 areas that are a little bit different in Texas from the previous  
6 one, and so that's been updated, so we can share this, and so just  
7 a little bit of history, and then I'll stop.

8  
9 The territorial sea is an ambulatory boundary. It was last updated  
10 in 2013, and so, as the coastline shifts, from erosion or sea level  
11 rise or whatever, that is periodically reviewed, and then this  
12 nine-nautical-mile boundary can be reset, and so it was done last  
13 in 2013. In the event that it's done sometime in the future, this  
14 line may change again, and then we can certainly keep you up to  
15 speed on that. That's all I have. If you have any questions, we  
16 can share this information, I believe, and so hopefully it works  
17 well.

18  
19 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Mara, you have I think -- Go ahead, Mara.

20  
21 **MS. LEVY:** Well, just to clarify, so the law that did this basically  
22 said that it's nine miles from the baseline from which the  
23 territorial sea is measured, and so, I mean, that's what it is,  
24 because that's what the law says.

25  
26 If the baseline changes, then the line automatically changes,  
27 regardless of whether we draw it or not, and so, I mean, the intent  
28 is, if the baseline committee updates the baseline points, and  
29 that shifts, that we would go in and, you know, look at that and  
30 change the boundary on the map, maybe give an updated line, but I  
31 just wanted to be clear that that's not in our hands. If the  
32 baseline committee changes the baseline, then, via the law, it's  
33 nine miles from that baseline, regardless of whether we produce a  
34 new map, but that hasn't happened yet.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Any other questions? That looks pretty  
37 good.

38  
39 **DR. DIAGNE:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and so the last item that was  
40 discussed during the LETC meeting had to do with the nomination  
41 process for Officer or Team of the Year. Typically, we, and I  
42 would say Ms. Roy, sends out the nomination forms. It's a Google  
43 form, and so each agency would nominate, you know, their candidate,  
44 one per agency.

45  
46 Afterwards, what we do now is that we have a closed session meeting  
47 in which they discuss the nomination, and each agency puts forward  
48 their top two, but they send it to us as an email separately. Then

1 we tally those, and those are the results that come to the council,  
2 typically during your April meeting.

3  
4 When we did this the last time, the LETC asked about the necessity  
5 for the closed session meeting, and so, essentially, what is  
6 suggested is that they could receive the Google form, send in their  
7 nomination, and then subsequently send the top two picks, if you  
8 would, and we would tally the votes.

9  
10 That would save them the time from attending that closed session  
11 webinar, and so, relative to that, they did pass a motion, a  
12 resolution. The LETC decided to streamline the nomination process  
13 by removing the closed session webinar for discussing nominees,  
14 because their votes were sent in confidence, essentially, by email,  
15 and so there is really no need to have that closed session, and so  
16 that is the resolution that they put forth.

17  
18 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Okay. Any questions on that? All right.  
19 Let's see. We're pretty close to the end.

20  
21 **DR. DIAGNE:** We are very close, and, if there are no questions, we  
22 would take this as, I mean, this committee recommending that the  
23 closed session could be essentially canceled now, eliminated, and  
24 the process would be streamlined, or, Mr. Chair, do you prefer to  
25 have a very short motion to that effect?

26  
27 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** Yes, I would. Let's entertain a motion to  
28 that, and it would basically be stated as it's stated there, that  
29 to remove the closed session webinar for discussion of nominee.  
30 Could I get that motion?

31  
32 **MR. BILLY BROUSSARD:** So moved.

33  
34 **MR. DONALDSON:** Second.

35  
36 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** We've got a motion and a second. We have to  
37 put the wording up right quick.

38  
39 **MR. J.D. DUGAS:** General Spraggins, who -- Billy made the motion,  
40 Mr. Broussard, and it was seconded by Mr. Donaldson.

41  
42 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** I think it would be officer nominees. I think  
43 we need to put the word "nominees" in there, or "nominations".  
44 Okay. Any questions on that? Anybody think we ought to modify  
45 that motion any different? Okay. We have a motion, and we have  
46 a second. Do we have any discussion? **The motion carries.**

47  
48 All right, sir. I think that pretty much completes it, doesn't

1 it?

2

3 **DR. DIAGNE:** Yes, sir, unless you have other business.

4

5 **CHAIRMAN SPRAGGINS:** That's what I was going to bring up. After  
6 that, do we have any other business for the Law Enforcement  
7 Committee? If not, Mr. Chairman, we will turn it back over, and,  
8 right now, I'm looking at about twelve minutes of time, and so, if  
9 we keep on this way, we'll be through by noon on Wednesday.

10

11 **DR. DIAGNE:** Thank you, sir.

12

13 (Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on January 26, 2026.)

14

15

16

- - -