



GULF COUNCIL

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April 20, 2026

Mr. Eugenio Piñeiro Soler
Assistant Administrator of Fisheries
NOAA Fisheries Service
U.S. Department of Commerce
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Mr. Piñeiro Soler:

At its April 7-9, 2026, meeting, the Gulf Council (Council) requested that National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) fully utilize the Fiscal Year 2026 appropriation of up to \$600,000 for implementation and enforcement of the Section 609 program of U.S. Public Law 101-162. The Council's request is intended to ensure that foreign shrimp fisheries exporting to the United States (U.S.) are held to sea turtle conservation standards that are comparable to those required in U.S. domestic fisheries.

This request originates from a motion adopted by the Council's Shrimp Advisory Panel (AP) at its March 2026 meeting. In its deliberations, the Shrimp AP emphasized the importance of effective Section 609 enforcement, particularly given that domestic wild-caught shrimp fisheries operate under strict and costly sea turtle conservation requirements while competing with imported wild-caught shrimp product. The Shrimp AP encouraged NMFS to use these funds to strengthen enforcement capacity via increased personnel support, expanded travel for turtle excluder device verification visits and workshops, and enhanced technology transfer funding to the Southeast Fisheries Science Center - Harvesting Systems Unit.

The Shrimp AP noted that technology transfers should include, but not be limited to, invitational travel to foreign fisheries agencies to attend turtle excluder device and fishing gear innovation training in Pascagoula, MS and Panama City, FL. The Shrimp AP encouraged NMFS to follow the directives set forth in the Senate Appropriations Committee's FY 2026 Report (S. Rpt. 119-44). On January 23, 2026, the President signed into law HR 6938 - which includes the FY2026 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations bill. The accompanying Joint Explanatory Statement incorporates by reference the Senate Appropriations Committee's Report (119-44) text as follows:

Sea Turtle Conservation.—The Committee reminds NOAA of the provisions in section 609 of Public Law 101–162 that prohibit the

importation of shrimp from nations that have not been certified by the United States as having sea turtle conservation measures in place that are comparable in effect to that which the United States requires of domestic shrimp fishermen. The Committee is concerned that this requirement is not being effectively enforced, placing global sea turtle populations at significant risk. Within Marine Mammals, Sea Turtles, and Other Species, the Committee provides up to \$600,000 to cover the costs for NMFS to fully and effectively enforce this statutory mandate to ensure that no nation or foreign commercial shrimp fishery that adversely affects sea turtles is certified under this authority. The Committee expects the agency to provide a complete description of the utilization of these funds and the status of the implementation and enforcement of this program in its 2025 Biennial Report to Congress required under 16 U.S.C. 1826h.

Full and effective enforcement of Section 609 is essential to protect sea turtles while maintaining fair market competition for U.S. shrimp fishermen. The Council respectfully urges NMFS to fully implement Section 609 consistent with the statutory mandate and the accompanying appropriations guidance. Thank you for your consideration of these requests, and if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Executive Director, Dr. Carrie Simmons.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jonathan Dugas", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mr. Jonathan Dugas
Council Chair

cc: Gulf Council
Council Staff
Clay Porch, Ph.D.
John Walter, Ph.D.
Andy Strelcheck
Shrimp AP