**Shrimp Task Force Meeting**

**Wednesday, December 9, 2020, 10:00am**

**St. Bernard Port Harbor and Terminal**

**100 Port Blvd. Chalmette, LA 70043**

**I. Pledge of Allegiance**

**II. Roll Call**

**Voting Members Present:**

George Barisich

Acy Cooper, Jr.

Lance Nacio

Rodney Olander

Alan Gibson

Andrew Blanchard

Craig Authement

**Voting Members Absent:**

Steven Sode

Kristen Baumer

**Non-Voting Members Present:**

Peyton Cagle

Edward Skena

Jack Isaacs

Gene Cavalier

**Non-Voting Members Absent:**

Dorothy Bankston

Justin Gremillion

**III.** Rodney Olander motioned to approve the August 5, 2020 meeting minutes, 2nd by George Barisich. Motion carries.

**IV.** Rodney Olander motioned to approve the December 9, 2020 meeting agenda, 2nd by Acy Cooper. Motion carries.

**V. Financial Report**

Fund Balance- $621,182

Budget Balance- $60,029

Acy Cooper motioned to approve the financial report as presented, 2nd by George Barisich. Motion carries.

**VI.** The task force reviewed an updated version of the Federal Shrimp Permit Report, which provides a list of those Federal shrimp permits set to expire

**VII.** New Business

1. Peyton Cagle led discussion on the results of the Shrimp Bycatch Study

Thirty-three shrimp fishing trips with 363 tows and 501 hours of tow time were observed from July 2019 through June 2020 from 12 individual commercial fishing vessels. Of the twelve participating vessels, 9 fished with skimmer nets, 2 with otter trawls, and 1 with butterfly net gear. The otter trawls were all equipped with bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) and turtle excluder devices, and two-thirds of the skimmer nets were equipped with BRDs.

Observer coverage of the fishery over the course of this study was approximately 0.1% (33 observed trips/37,203 fishery trips) and nearly proportional to the number of fishery trips by gear, CSA, and fishing season with the exception of CSA 6 and 7 due to the lack of fishery participation in those areas (Table 2, Figure 2). From the 363 observed tows, 14,266 kg of total catch was observed consisting of 105 unique species or grouped species (Table 3). Four species of penaeid shrimp, 82 finfish species, 12 crustacean species (excluding penaeid shrimp), and 7 non-crustacean invertebrate species were observed. Penaeid shrimp species were the highest group caught by weight (48.1%), followed by finfish (40.2%), crustaceans other than penaeid shrimp (5.0%), and invertebrates (3.0%). Debris made up 3.7% of the total catch by weight. The most abundant species caught consisting of >1% by weight of the total catch were white shrimp (44.3%), Gulf menhaden, (14.1%), Atlantic croaker (5.4%), blue crab (4.9%), brown shrimp (3.7%), spot (3.2%), jellyfish sp. (2.9%), sand seatrout (2.8%), hardhead catfish (2.2%), gafftopsail catfish (2.1%), and Atlantic cutlassfish (2.1%). The bycatch to shrimp sample ratio error distribution was assumed lognormal and the corresponding sample ratio geometric mean in units of weight was 1.01 (Table 4). Size compositions and mean sizes of penaeid shrimp and the managed and commonly harvested species catches are presented in Table 5. Catch composition of large specimens not represented in the volumetric samples are presented in Table 6 along with released condition and corresponding size and weight measurements if available. Interactions with diamondback terrapins were observed in which all were released alive (Table 6). No interactions with sea turtles were observed.

Main Bycatch Identification

Gulf menhaden and blue crab were identified as the main bycatch species of the current LA commercial shrimp fishery per ANI standards. Both are managed species that are greater than 1% of the total catch by weight. The other non-target species consisting of greater than 1% of the total catch are non-managed species not regulated for recreational, bait, or commercial use. No non-managed non-target species was greater than 10% of the total catch by weight.

Andrew Blanchard commended LDWF for the study and the hard work

1. Peyton Cagle led discussion on the Gulf RFM Sustainability Certification and future implications

There is a list of action items that needs to be addressed that has gone in the 2015 comprehensive FIP that was finalized in 2016. There are a few action items that we are still working on: The Shrimp Fisheries Management Plan, it’s recommended that it go out for external review. Typically when a management plan is done, it’s completed in house. If this board deems important, it can be requested that the department send the plan for external review. Some other action items would be a Federal tax assessment for shrimp. What was done for blue crab was thresholds were set in place. So if these thresholds hit certain points you can come up with a list of action plans. Something the STF can do is to take a precautionary approach by going to the LDWF Commission with a resolution asking them to take action and consider management options if a certain threshold is hit or X,Y,Z were to take place.

 The next step would be for the STF to consider ownership of the certification. Who should hold the ownership? As of right now the Department holds these certifications for the state, but in the future would like the certification to be owned by the industry. The department would still be there to assist and provide data as needed, but will be owned and controlled by the industry. AS of right now we have some goals still to meet and we are working on that right now with the shrimp FMP. It is hopeful that the Gulf RMF program will be progressing forward by the end of next year. Right now you have Texas, Mississippi, and Alabama all working together on a comprehensive FIPs, but to do this now which you could do is go through and pay for the certification bodies to assess where you’re at now for pre-assessment. That will tell you either yes you are recommended for certification or no, you still have work to do. The task force can decide to take that step or wait until these other things play out, the FMP external review, the precautionary approach- getting support from the Commission by laying out some action items that the commission could agree to take place.

These decisions need to be made: who’s going to own the certification? Where is payment for the certification coming from? How do we want to run it?

Acy Cooper suggested waiting until Mississippi is done and all states do it together

Alan Gibson stated that the issue is imports versus domestic; if this process is done individually it’s going to be a mess on the dock and processors side, recommended finding out how the states can work together. Requested some feedback on how much money has been spent vs. how much still needs to be spent in the next 3-5 years? What’s the best way to have a joint conversation between the states? Concern with where the return is for the industry on making this investment?

John Fallon stated that the first six months of 2021 will be dedicated to start having state meetings, possibly in March

1. Peyton Cagle led discussion on the 2019 disaster spending plan

In the process of developing spending plans from the 2019 fisheries disaster money that has been rewarded. The money has been awarded but not given to us as of yet. A spending plan needs to be developed, the plan is then sent to NOAA to be reviewed and accepted, once the plan has been reviewed and accepted by NOAA then the department can dedicate x amount of dollars to certain projects. We would like to hear the recommendations of the industry on how this money might be best spent. The true direction for fisheries disaster money is to be spent on projects or things that can make the industry more resilient should another disaster happen.

One recommendation made by a shrimp industry member was to prop wash the Ostrica Locks to allow navigation

Rodney Olander suggested dredging a set of jetties in the Calumet Cut, direct payments to fishermen, equipment purchases, the process needs to be expedited, it’s sad it has taken this long to get the money

Patrick Banks stated that he understands the slowness of the process is frustrating, but we do not have much control over the process as the majority of the process is at the Federal level. So when they tell us in March/ April/ May of this year that we have $53M for the fisheries disaster that deals with crabs, finfish, oysters and shrimp we started putting together ideas on a spending plan. We started putting together some ideas, then we needed to meet with the industry. Around that same time is when the CARES Act funding came down. While we can ask for direct payments from the fisheries disaster funding it’s going to be very hard to get that approved. So that’s why we moved forward with the program (CARES Act) that would get direct payments to the fishermen. So now that we are in the part of the CARES Act process where things are moving we can shift our attention back towards the fisheries disaster funding. It would be great to have a letter from the task force that outlines the shrimp industry’s suggestions on how the money might best be spent. The faster we get feedback from the industry the faster this spending plan can be submitted for review.

Andrew Blanchard motioned to form a Fisheries Disaster Spending Plan Committee to work with LDWF to develop ideas to submit for the Federal Fisheries Disaster Spending Plan, 2nd by Acy Cooper. Motion carries.

Rodney Olander, Acy Cooper, and Andrew Blanchard were all appointed members of the Shrimp Disaster Plan Committee

Acy Cooper motioned to add discussion of the CARES Act to the agenda for discussion now, 2nd by Rodney Olander. Motion carries.

Alan Gibson stated that some people did not qualify for the CARES Act, is there any other program or second opportunity for those people who did not qualify with any money that is left over?

There will be a 2nd round of CARES Act funding but the cap will still remain at $10K

Around 2000 applicants for the CARES Act funding and of those 2000 around 100 were disqualified

The task force was interested in knowing whether or not the qualifications and the funding cap could be changed for CARES Act funding- most of the qualifications are set on a Federal level by NOAA, so these changes would have to first be approved by them

1. Mike McDonough provided a presentation to the board on a South Pass 37 SARS proposal

South Pass 37 “C”: the derrick, The derrick was part of equipment package (Kerr-McGee Rig 56) that was toppled by Hurricane Betsy. The structure has been in two pieces or piles ever since at 160’ water depth.

Positives: The Pieces/piles are currently functioning as artificial reef material, Recreational anglers support leaving in place (25 emails, 11 letters)

Negative: The derrick poses potential hazards to shrimp trawl effort and pipelines

Experts say:

Shore Offshore- “In our experience, we do not see a safe or efficient way to remove the existing debris. From the information provided, we would expect that the debris will eventually dissipate.”

Epic Companies- “The structure is so deteriorated from years of neglect that we feel it is extremely dangerous for divers and support personnel to remove the derrick from the seafloor. We appreciate the opportunity to bid on this work but as mentioned above at this time we are unable to submit costs.”

Decisions: SP-37 is not approved; Council will make decision at future meeting; Shrimp Task Force input integral to decision

Acy Cooper asked if there were any attempts to get the structure after the hurricane; stated that it doesn’t look like debris has scattered on its own

Alan Gibson stated that it’s been an active reef and the liability to remove is high, why not just leave it there for fishing? It’s been there for 55 years and no issue yet, leave it there

Rodney Olander motioned that the task force make the recommendation to the Council to leave the structure/s as is and not do anything with it, 2nd by Andrew Blanchard. Motion carries.

1. Acy Cooper led discussion on the Turtle Excluder Device Funding Program

Acy Cooper stated that he would like to request LDWF help set up a meeting with the Attorney General to help with the new TEDs rule which requires that 40ft and greater trawling vessels have a turtle excluder device.

Barry Rogers stated that he recently met with NOAA, was told that it is not financially viable for 39ft vessels to make it with a TED but it is financially viable for vessels that are 40ft and over. Feels that this is discrimination

Patrick Banks stated that he would work on getting a meeting set up and reach out to the Attorney General’s Office

Peyton Cagle stated that as far as the TED funding goes, if you or anyone you know has trouble registering for the class please contact Julia Lightner or Peyton Cagle

1. Acy Cooper led discussion on shrimp prices

The shrimp prices started out at $.35/lb hearing that the docks are taking too much money, may have to wait to continue discussion when docks can be in attendance at the meeting

Jack Isaacs stated that import numbers for January-October 2020, imports 90M lbs higher than in same period last year; imports of peeled 20M less than same period last year

Alan Gibson stated that imports have always been an issue; the task force has been going to Washington, D.C. for years and nothing is done; the issue is domestic vs import no one has helped; would like to see a lot more preparation before going back to DC with the state

Patrick Banks stated that all that can be done at the state level is try and get more action from the Feds; would be happy to accompany the industry to D.C., but would need a heads up to coordinate

Alan Gibson requested more input, planning and support from the state; look into fuel subsidies for shrimp boats and justification or price structures for foreign imports

Patrick Banks stated that he would reach out to the Governor’s liaison to discuss these issues further

Alan Gibson stated that if the Governor’s office would get behind the industry it might encourage other states and the Feds to involved

1. Acy Cooper led discussion on aid for LA coastal fishermen due to 2020 hurricanes and evacuation losses

Acy Cooper stated that every time a storm comes the shrimp industry loses two weeks of work, what can be done?

Peyton Cagle stated that the department is currently in the process of analyzing data now to find out if we qualify and can apply for another fisheries disaster; have to prove a minimum 355 loss; there has to be 12 months of consecutive data, are we still suffering loss, will it do on to February. A timeline needs to be established, as to when the start and end dates are for this 12 month period. The same process is required, but if the disaster is awarded we will put together a final report showing the summary of losses

1. Acy Cooper led discussion on the Main Street Recovery Grant

Grant applications closed in October, but were supposed to close in November; LDWF to find out more information on this grant and whether more money is being put back into it or not

1. George Barisich led discussion on sending a letter to the Governor’s office to request the assistance of the Attorney General

George Barisich motioned to write a letter to the Governor’s Office requesting that the Governor meet with the Attorney General to seek injunctive relief for the proposed TEDs regulation on 40ft and greater skimmer vessels, 2nd by Rodney Olander. Motion carries.

George Barisich motioned to send a copy of the Governor’s letter to every skimmer license holder to make them aware of the real consequences of these regulations and the fact that there is recourse if the Governor will fight to protect our industry, 2nd by Rodney Olander. Motion carries.

1. Craig Authement motioned to add an item to the agenda, J. To Discuss the Lower Bayou Petit Caillou Ridge Restoration Project and the HNC Lock Complex Bypass Canal Project

Lower Bayou Petit Caillou Ridge Restoration Project: Located in Cocodrie, Louisiana, this ridge is a part of the southern-most portion of the Morganza to the Gulf Hurricane Protection System. With only, 8-10 residents living South of the Morganza to the Gulf along Little Caillou, Cocodrie is home to several camps, hotels, restaurants, and marinas, just to name a few. Cocodrie is also home to LUMCON, a higher education facility owned by the State of Louisiana.

HNC Lock Complex Bypass Canal Project: When the threat of severe weather approaches Terrebonne Parish, TLCD has to close the Grand Caillou floodgate very early on before we receive tropical storm force winds and storm surge. In the past years, vessels are being locked out of the Grand Caillou Floodgate. This project would consist of dredging a by-pass canal connecting Bayou Grand Caillou to the HNC just south of the location HNC Lock Complex, therefore, eliminating a 6-hour detour to enter into the HNC.

Andrew Blanchard motioned to write a letter of support for the Lower Bayou Petit Caillou Ridge Restoration Project and the HNC Lock Complex Bypass Project, 2nd by Acy Cooper. Motion carries.

**VIII.** Public Comment

The task force requested to add an agenda item for the next meeting to discuss CPRA’s National Estuarine Research Reserve System and Site Designation Process

IX. Next meeting set for Wednesday, March 10, 2020 10am, location TBD

X. Andrew Blanchard motioned to adjourn, 2nd by Acy Cooper. Motion carries.