



Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council

Managing Fishery Resources in the U.S. Federal Waters of the Gulf of Mexico

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September 13, 2023

Dr. Cisco Werner

Director of Scientific Programs and Chief Science Advisor

NOAA Fisheries

1315 East-West Highway

14th Floor

Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Dr. Werner:

At its August 14-17, 2023 meeting, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) received an overview on the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Climate Ready Fisheries Programs and Initiatives from Dr. Evan Howell on the \$349,000,000 in funding that NOAA Fisheries received. During this presentation, Dr. Howell highlighted NOAA Fisheries' plan for the *Essential Data Collection and Advanced Technologies* portion of the climate ready funding goals which included the following: Essential Data Collection; Advanced Technology Adoptions; and Protected Species Climate Strategy¹. "A specific emphasis was placed on "Advanced Technology development with strategic use of funds for Traditional Platform Data Acquisition, primarily in FY23 and FY24" in the presentation². The Council is appreciative of the overview that Dr. Howell provided on this particular funding opportunity and thinks there are some vital programs in the Southeast region that directly meet the needs of NOAA Fisheries' national program initiatives to manage climate ready fisheries. Specifically, the Council would like NOAA Fisheries to consider whether this funding can be used to advance technologies and data acquisition for the federally managed Gulf shrimp fishery.

Data Acquisition and Need:

Beginning in 2013, approximately 1/3 of the 1,300 federally permitted Gulf shrimp vessels were required to install a hardware device that archives vessel position on a shrimp vessel and transmits that data via cellular service to NMFS. Since December 31, 2020, the 3G cellular network was no longer supported by any network providers, and the logbook program has reverted to manually sending Secure Digital cards through the mail to the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission as a stop gap measure until the Council can develop a new system. The Council is currently working a document to consider modifying the method used to collect vessel position data for the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery but is awaiting pilot testing of the hardware and software devices to be completed, as many of the cellular vessel monitoring system (cVMS) devices approved for use in other fisheries have not proven, to date, to be robust enough to

¹ [IRA Climate Ready Fisheries Component Councils \(squarespace.com\)](https://www.squarespace.com)

² <https://gulfcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/G-6a-IRA-Presentation-GMFMC-August-14-2023.pdf>

withstand months at sea. This new system aims to maintain the Council's and NMFS' scientific ability to monitor the fleet.

The need for this data is immense, and a successful and robust effort monitoring program of the shrimp industry is necessary to evaluate compliance with the effort cap for protected resources such as sea turtles, sawfish, and giant manta rays as well as compliance with the applicable shrimp fishing effort reduction threshold for addressing juvenile red snapper bycatch. Additionally, this effort monitoring program has been utilized to evaluate federal and state marine spatial management areas such as habitat areas of particular concern and, more recently in the NOAA Aquaculture Opportunity Areas and aquaculture facility sites. The Bureau of Ocean and Energy Management (BOEM) has also been engaging the shrimp industry and Council on the proposed areas for wind energy development in the Gulf of Mexico, and the determination of historical shrimping effort is being evaluated spatially from this monitoring program.

Efforts by Industry to Date:

The shrimp industry also recognized the need for funding to more quickly replace the old, stop gap program and lobbied Congress for funds to aid in the testing of type-approved cVMS units as well as for the consideration of other data improvements and storage for the program. Congress awarded \$850,000 for this effort, and in May 2023, the Southeast Fisheries Science Center presented to the Shrimp Advisory Panel and to the Council a proposed spend plan to modernize the Gulf shrimp fleet with this funding³. Within the spend plan, after testing of the hardware/software devices on shrimp vessels and successful selection of approved vendors by NOAA Fisheries, a portion of the of the funding was to be utilized to install units on approximately 100-200 vessels. This was considered part of the early adopter phase and was envisioned to be in place prior to the regulations being implemented.

Council Request:

Unfortunately, the amount of funding being put toward installation and reimbursement of approved hardware/software cVMS devices will fall short of outfitting the remaining approximate 400⁺ shrimp vessels that are currently required to report, not to mention other vessels that may be required by the Science and Research Director to report in the future. It is clear that the data needs for the Gulf shrimp fishery meet the goals of the *Essential Data Collection and Advanced Technologies* portion of the climate ready funding. The Council, therefore, requests that NMFS consider the potential use, within the Inflation Reduction Act funding, of the monies allotted to the southeast be considered for reimbursement to the Gulf shrimp fleet for these type-approved cVMS units or NMFS-approved cellular electronic logbooks. Additionally, the Council requests NMFS use the funding for other data storage improvements, such as cloud-based servers for direct transmission either to NMFS or to a non-Office of Law Enforcement branch of NMFS. If NMFS determines these items or any other items to be a feasible use of funds, then Council staff can prepare a funding proposal if needed.

Thank you for your consideration, and if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Carrie Simmons. The Council looks forward to your response.

³ <https://gulfcouncil.org/meetings/ap/shrimp-ap-may-2023/>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kevin Anson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mr. Kevin Anson
Council Chair

cc: Gulf Council
Council Staff
Janet Coit
Sam Rauch
Evan Howell, Ph.D.
Clay Porch, Ph.D.
John Walter, Ph.D.
Alan Lowther, Ph.D.
Molly Stevens, Ph.D.
Katie Siegfried, Ph.D.
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