

Shrimp Advisory Panel Summary

Webinar Meeting

March 24, 2020

9:00am – 10:30am

Members Present:

Corky Perret, Chair
Steve Bosarge, Vice-Chair
Thu Bui
Glenn Delaney
Gary Graham
Andrea Hance
Lance Nacio
Franklin Parker
John Williams

NMFS Staff:

Michael Barnette
Sue Gerhart
Frank Helies
Mara Levy
Richard Malinowski
Michelle Masi
Frank Parker
Adam Pollack
Mike Travis

Council Staff:

Matt Freeman
John Froeschke
Karen Hoak
Jessica Matos
Bernadine Roy
Charlotte Schiaffo
Camilla Shireman
Carrie Simmons

Council Members:

Leann Bosarge
JD Dugas
Tom Frazer
Robin Riechers
Lance Robinson
Chris Schieble
Joe Spraggins

The Shrimp Advisory Panel met on March 24, 2020 via webinar. The shortened agenda was adopted. The minutes from the March 21, 2019, meeting were approved.

Biological Review of the Texas Closure

Dr. Michelle Masi provided a biological review of the Texas closure. She noted that the Original Shrimp Fishery Management Plan was implemented in 1981 with one of the goals being to increase the yield of brown shrimp harvested from offshore Texas waters. She also noted that, historically, the closure has been from mid-May to mid-July. Since 1981, landings for offshore Texas brown shrimp in July have declined, which corresponds with the closure. Beginning in the mid-1990s, a noticeable increase in landings for offshore Texas brown shrimp in August has occurred, and this corresponds with the initiation of the near shore Texas closure, which began in 1990 and in conjunction with the timing of the offshore closure. However, the August 2019 offshore Texas landings of brown shrimp have declined to the level of the early 1990s.

August 2019 had landings that are primarily in the 41-50 and 51-67 count size categories and very low levels of landings in the >67 count size category, which suggests the Texas closure is effectively allowing the brown shrimp stock to reach a larger size.

In the upper Texas Ports, Jefferson, Kema, and Galveston have seen an increase in landings since the late 1990s; Chambers and Harris have seen a decrease in landings since the late 1990s. In the middle Texas ports, all ports have experienced a decline in landings since the late 1990s, with the exception of Palacios, although landings in 2019 in Palacios have declined to the mid-1990 levels. In the lower Texas ports, all ports have seen a decline in landings, with the exception of Brownville.

Offshore Texas white shrimp landings in July 2019 were mostly in large count size categories, indicating that the Texas closure has been effective in allowing white shrimp to grow to a larger size. Offshore Texas white shrimp landings in August 2019 showed a slight increase in the amount of shrimp caught in the smaller count size categories, compared to landings in July 2019; most landings still occurred in the five largest count size categories (<15, 15-20, 21-25, 26-30, and 31-40), with the highest level of landings in the 15-20 count size category.

For 2019, the inshore Texas brown shrimp landings from May through August were below the historical average, with 65.5% of the landings occurring in August. In 2019, the offshore Texas brown shrimp landings in May through August were also below the historical average; however, only 1.4% of landings in May through August of 2019 occurred in the smallest count size category, >67. Jefferson County had the highest percentage of landings, of all Texas ports, again in 2019.

In 2019, white shrimp landings in offshore Texas from July through August were below the historical average. The 2019 SEAMAP yield-per-recruit-analysis showed the percentage change in yield due to the Texas Closure was well above average; the 2019 SEAMAP catch per unit effort off Texas was greater than in 2018.

AP asked staff to check if the purpose of the closure in the Original Shrimp Fishery Management Plan was to increase not just yield but also value. Following Dr. Masi's presentation, the AP then made the following motion:

Motion: To request NMFS to continue with the Texas federal closure in the coming year with the conjunction with the state of Texas closure in 2020.

Motion carried with no opposition.

Following the motion, the Gulf Council's Shrimp Committee inquired what the 2020 conditions were looking like so far, with the note that Mississippi is experiencing lower salinity than usual. Dr. Masi explained that there is about a year lag in receiving landings data, so she is unable to answer that question. The Shrimp Committee clarified that it was referring to environmental conditions. Dr. Masi asked if anyone from the Southeast Regional Office or from industry would like to comment on environmental conditions; no responses were given.

Update on modifications to skimmer trawl regulations

Michael Barnette from NMFS-SERO presented on new turtle excluder device requirements for skimmer trawl vessels 40 feet and greater in length in the Southeastern U.S. He discussed the

use of observers, in order to examine tow times and size of sea turtles encountered. The new regulations are expected to affect 1,062 vessels. The majority of these vessels are based in Louisiana. The annual conservation benefits are in the range of 801 to 1,158 sea turtles.

The AP inquired as to the minimum size of the grid that can be used. Mr. Barnette responded that it would be a 32"x32" grid, same as other with vessels. He noted that a lot of the materials for construction are similar. He specified that only top shooters would be allowed; bottom shooters would not be allowed. The AP asked for clarification on which vessels that the bar rule applies. Mr. Barnette responded that, for the bar rules, it applies only to skimmer trawl vessels 40 feet and greater in length. The AP requested that outreach be extended to Gulf states other than Louisiana, even though the majority of impacted vessels are based in Louisiana. The AP asked if any data exists on what percentage of skimmer trawl effort occurs in federal waters. Mr. Barnette initially responded that he believes it is entirely in state waters, given the gear used. Following the AP meeting, Mr. Barnette noted that there are areas of shallow water in western Louisiana beyond the state waters that could be fished by skimmer trawls.

Other Business

The AP asked for an update from the 2019 Shrimp AP meeting regarding whether or not a Purpose and Need section was needed for a framework action that is supported by a National Environmental Policy Act Categorical Exclusion, as there was disagreement during last year's meeting. Following the meeting, NMFS legal counsel noted that a Purpose and Need statement is needed to support a number of legal requirements including the Regulatory Impact Review and Regulatory Flexibility Act Analysis.

The AP meeting adjourned at 9:50 am eastern time.