UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
Southeast Regional Office
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505
https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/region/southeast

08/11/2022

F/SER25:FH

Dr. Carrie Simmons, Executive Director
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
4107 West Spruce Street, Suite 200
Tampa, Florida 33607

Dear Dr. Simmons:

Enclosed is a request from Texas Sea Grant to obtain an exempted fishing permit (EFP). The EFP would be valid through December 31, 2024, commencing on the date the EFP is issued. The application submitted to NOAA Fisheries involves the testing of new bycatch reduction device (BRD) designs in the commercial shrimp fishery in federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico (Gulf). The Better BRDs for the Gulf Shrimp Fleet Project is a collaborative effort amongst Louisiana Sea Grant, Texas Sea Grant, NOAA Restoration Center, and NOAA Fisheries to restore finfish populations injured by the Deepwater Horizon oil spill through development and certification of new BRDs for the commercial shrimp industry throughout the Gulf. The EFP would exempt these research activities from federal regulations specific to the shrimp fishery in federal waters of the Gulf at 50 CFR § 622.53 - BRD requirements. The project is summarized below.

This project would identify and develop new bycatch-reducing technology to minimize commercial shrimp trawl fishing pressure on finfish populations and advance cost-effective solutions and incentives that would maximize the adoption of improved BRDs. New BRD designs would first be vetted by NOAA Fisheries Gear Research Branch partners during proof-of-concept dive testing aboard the R/V *Caretta* off Panama City, Florida. The applicant would further evaluate the vetted BRDs through an incentivized commercial stakeholder testing period prior to certification trials. This would allow for data collection on the strengths and weaknesses of new gear across the mosaic of species and environmental conditions within the Gulf. This testing would also aid in the acceptance of new BRDs by the commercial shrimping industry when the most promising designs are later submitted for certification.

Up to 30 federally-permitted commercial Gulf shrimp vessels would be selected to test gear that passed the proof-of-concept dive testing. The incentivized gear testing effort would continue up to submission for BRD certification. During testing, vessels listed on this EFP would be surveyed for qualitative information about the new BRDs, and any other use recommendations that are needed. Additional information including time and difficulty to install, longevity, ease of use (tangling during deployment/retrieval, shark damage), bycatch and shrimp retention characteristics, and overall cost would be collected to assist with recruitment for industry wide roll out. Protocols for the collection of these data on the test BRDs aboard commercial shrimp trawl vessels would mirror those of the NOAA Fisheries Observer Program and the processes outlined in the NOAA Fisheries Bycatch Reduction Device Testing Manual. Information from the gear tests would be collected and managed by Sea Grant University researchers with

summaries provided to NOAA partners on a regular basis.

For your review, please find enclosed a draft EFP for this proposed activity. Please contact us should you have questions or concerns about issuance of this EFP. If you need additional information, please contact Frank Helies at (727) 824-5305.

Sincerely,

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Digitally signed by AMENDOLA.KIMBERLY.BARBARA.1365830769
Date: 2022.08.11 18:27:33 -04'00'

for Andrew J. Strelcheck
Regional Administrator

cc: John McGovern, Ph.D
Peter Hood
Mara Levy

Enclosure