



Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Fishery Improvement Roundtable Proposed Goals, Objectives and Areas for Discussion

Overview

To address the challenges facing the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery, the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP) and Ocean Conservancy and Texas Sea Grant are working to bring together fishermen, suppliers, seafood buyers, conservation groups and other fishery experts to explore new and innovative ways to move this valuable and important fishery towards sustainability.

The Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery is unsustainable in a number of ways, including high levels of bycatch, impacts on threatened species, poor fuel efficiency in the face of volatile fuel prices, trawl gear impacts on benthic habitats and minimal enforcement of protected zones. Practices need to improve in both the US and Mexican parts of the fishery.

Remedies exist, including increasing the use of more fuel efficient gear, improved bycatch reduction devices (BRDs), capacity reduction, access privileges, and improving compliance with Marine Protected Areas and other spatial management regulations. In the US, the reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSRA) calls for many of the necessary improvement actions. The challenge is to ensure it is implemented effectively. Implementation of these steps can move the industry towards the ultimate goal of certification of all or portions of the U.S. Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery to the Marine Stewardship Council standard as a “sustainable and well-managed fishery.”

The over-arching *goal* of the project is to reduce the environmental impact of the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery, improve and strengthen management, and make the fishery more sustainable while assisting Gulf shrimp fishermen in the transition to cleaner, more fuel-efficient trawl gear.

The *purpose* of the project – the way in which it will achieve its goal – is to engage large buyers in requiring realistic environmental improvements in the fishery, through a U.S. Fisheries Improvement Roundtable where shrimpers, local processors, leading shrimp buyers and others identify environmental, technical and financial opportunities and action plans to help achieve those improvements.

The Fisheries Improvement Roundtable members will ultimately determine what improvements they will push for, but at a minimum will encourage large buyers to set performance standards for BRDs, set fuel efficiency standards, require the use of electronic monitoring systems, support for identifying environmentally sensitive areas, and compliance with area closures.

Roundtable Participants

The U.S. Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Fishery Roundtable will be made up of representatives from the entire supply chain including fishermen, processors, major buyers, equipment suppliers, Gulf States Sea Grant Advisory programs, conservation organizations and other committed stakeholders.

The Roundtable will be organized by the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership and Ocean Conservancy.

Sustainable Fisheries Partnership

The mission of the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership is to maintain healthy ocean and aquatic ecosystems, enhance fishing and fish-farming livelihoods and secure food supplies. SFP was formed in 2006 as an independent nonprofit organization capable of breaking new ground in the world of sustainable seafood and marine and freshwater conservation by focusing on improving the seafood supply chain.

Ocean Conservancy

Founded in 1972, the Ocean Conservancy promotes healthy and diverse ocean ecosystems and opposes practices that threaten ocean life and human life. Through research, education, and science-based advocacy, Ocean Conservancy informs, inspires, and empowers people to speak and act on behalf of the oceans. Ocean Conservancy focuses efforts on four priorities where the need is tantamount and the opportunity to make a difference is great: conserving special ocean places, restoring American fisheries, protecting marine wildlife, and reforming government for better ocean stewardship.

Texas Sea Grant

Texas Sea Grant has been working with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), state agencies and fishing organizations throughout the Gulf to assist shrimp fishermen adopt the new federally-mandated bycatch reduction devices (BRDs). In addition, Texas Sea Grant has worked with shrimp fishermen throughout the Gulf to help introduce new fishing gear and techniques designed to lower fuel costs, improve shrimp quality and lessen environmental impacts.

Proposed Objectives

The proposed objectives of the Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Fishery Improvement Roundtable include:

- Support performance standards for bycatch reduction devices (BRDs) at or above the federally mandated level and facilitate the introduction of better performing BRDs.
- Requirement that BRDs be used in all state waters.
- Set fuel efficiency standards and facilitate the transition to fuel efficient nets and cambered steel trawl doors.
- Fleet-wide use of electronic monitoring systems.
- Address fleet capacity issues.
- Promote and publicize the work of shrimpers employing low impact gear and develop marketing strategies that engage the marketplace in rewarding fishermen who have made the transition to better gear and practices.
- Certification of all or part of the U.S. Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery to the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) standard for sustainability.
- Recognition and support by major shrimp buyers in the United States and Europe of the improvements underway in the Gulf shrimp fishery.

Potential Action Items and Areas for Discussion

Clean Gear

- In conjunction with Texas Sea Grant, document and network with shrimpers regarding the positive impacts of better BRDs, hydrodynamic trawl doors, lighter nets and other technologies.
- Conduct economic analysis of the cost/benefit of cleaner gear (equipment cost versus fuel savings, etc.).
- Insure vessel operators are adequately trained in the use of new gear.
- Increase the usage of this gear in state and federal waters.

Alternative/Creative Clean Gear Financing

- Investigate carbon offset market as funding source for financing new gear.
- Evaluate creation of “bycatch conservation trust” where organizations can pay to lower Gulf bycatch with funds used for loan pool to finance clean gear.
- Investigate other financing options such as creating a Gulf of Mexico Loan Fund program to assist fishermen with securing the funds needed to not only buy the “cleaner” gear (steel trawl doors, lighter nets, highest performing bycatch reduction devices) but also to help them with much-needed funds for repairs and ongoing maintenance.

Marine Stewardship Council Certification

- Conduct MSC pre-assessment to identify issues and potential obstacles to full certification.
- Identify specifications for MSC certification (fishing areas, shrimp species, gear types, etc.)

Marketing Support

- Engage U.S. NGOs promoting sustainable seafood (i.e. Seafood Choices Alliance, Monterey Bay Aquarium Seafood Watch program).
- Publicize and promote example set by retailers engaged in the Roundtable
- Publicize clean gear initiative to U.S. buyers seeking sources of sustainable shrimp.
- Facilitate communication with buyers in Europe seeking sustainable head-on shrimp.
- Post information on Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery on FishSource™ enabling buyers to review documents and data relating to sustainability of the fishery.

Management and Policy Reform

The Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Fishery Improvement Roundtable will not lobby for management and policy reform but may support the work of other organizations that lobby regulatory bodies with respect to:

- Excess fishing capacity

- Achieving red snapper bycatch reduction goals
- Strengthening of BRD performance requirements