18 August, 2021

To: Producers of Gulf of Mexico shrimp
From: Members of the Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Supply Chain Roundtable
Re: Support for research to fully identify all shrimp fishery bycatch

We are writing today to express our support for the bycatch identification project ("Resolving Barriers to Sustainable Fishery Certification for the Gulf of Mexico Federal Shrimp Fishery") being implemented by LGL Ecological Research and Texas Sea Grant, which is designed to gather, identify, and quantify all unidentified bycatch within the samples taken by the NOAA observer program for the federal shrimp fishery in 2021. The NOAA observer program is supporting this project by asking their observers to bag and tag the unidentified portion of the bycatch sample. We are asking that any vessels selected by NOAA to carry an observer during the remainder of 2021 support this research project by providing freezer space for these bycatch samples onboard vessels and in shoreside freezers. (A Project Team member – Gary Graham, Laura Picariello or Sara Stewart – will contact vessels selected by the NOAA observer program to provide more information on this research project and formally request vessel participation.) We, as processors and distributors, will then give our support to the research team to help facilitate transport of the bycatch samples to a lab in Texas where full identification of bycatch will occur.

This research project is a direct result of a Bycatch Workshop commissioned by us (the Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Supply Chain Roundtable) in 2018. The results of the workshop indicated that one of the remaining sustainability challenges in the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery is lack of full bycatch identification by the observer program. Due to time limitations, observers cannot perform full identification of bycatch onboard vessels, and must focus on identification of 20 or so of the most frequently caught or commercially/recreationally important species. The remainder of the bycatch is lumped together in "unclassified" categories, which leaves a substantial gap in information on what is caught as bycatch in the shrimp fishery.

We recognize the inconvenience this request will pose to shrimp boat captains and crew, as well as the shoreside handling infrastructure. But we ask that, if contacted, you cooperate and lend your full support to the project, which is funded by a time-limited grant from the Saltonstall-Kennedy Grant Program (until the end of 2021). This funding provides an incredible opportunity (with little cost to the industry) to address longstanding criticisms of the shrimp fishery due to bycatch and will help to build the reputation of the Gulf of Mexico shrimp fishery as a sustainable industry that proactively resolves sustainability challenges.

Respectfully,

The Undersigned Members of the Gulf of Mexico Shrimp Supply Chain Roundtable

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