

**Finfish Task Force Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, March 24, 2022, 10:00am  
LDWF Headquarters  
2000 Quail Dr.  
Baton Rouge, LA 70898**

- I. Pledge of Allegiance
- II. Call to order
- III. Roll call and introduction of guests

**Voting Members Present:**

James Pelas  
Daryl Simon  
Acy Cooper, III  
Jay Trotter  
Daniel Edgar  
Ben Graham  
Stuart Billeaud  
Steve Rockwieler

**Voting Members Absent:**

Wayne Rollo  
George Huye  
Adam Guillory  
Senator Bob Hensgens  
Representative John Stefanski

**Non-Voting Members Present:**

Jason Adriance  
Bryan Marie  
Jack Isaacs  
Gene Cavalier in for Todd Parker

**Non-voting Members Absent:**

Adam Eitmann  
Justin Gremillion

IV. Stuart Billeaud motioned to approve the August 25, 2021 meeting minutes, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Daniel Edgar. Motion carries.

V. Daniel Edgar motioned to amend the agenda and add to New Business, item E. To hear an update on Red Snapper and Item G. To hear an update on the USDA Covid-19 Grant Program-LDAF, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Stuart Billeaud. Motion carries.

Daniel Edgar motioned to approve the agenda as amended, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Stuart Billeaud. Motion carries.

VI. New Business:

A. Jason Adriance led discussion on shark regulations and possible state management options

Quotas and Commercial Seasons • Commercial quotas and seasons established at the federal level:

- Three groups of sharks with quotas (Large Coastal (LCS), Pelagic Sharks, and Small Coastal (SCS))
- LCS – blacktip, bull, lemon, tiger, spinner, nurse, smooth hammerhead, great hammerhead, scalloped hammerhead, silky, and sandbar
- SCS – sharpnose, bonnethead, blacknose, and finetooth
- Pelagic – common thresher, shortfin mako, oceanic whitetip, blue, and porbeagle
  - Gulf of Mexico (GOM) LCS commercial quota split between the eastern GOM and the western GOM, pelagic sharks is nationwide Atlantic and GOM quota
  - Western Gulf of Mexico LCS quota contains three subgroups
    - Blacktip Sharks
    - Aggregated Large Coastal Sharks
    - Hammerhead Sharks
- 2021 commercial Western GOM LCS Quotas (if hammerhead quota is met, aggregated LCS closes)
  - Blacktip – 765,392 pounds
  - Aggregated LCS – 158,724 pounds
  - Hammerhead – 26,301 pounds
- Commercial LCS season usually opens January 1 of each year until the quota is met at a 45 shark per day limit
- All shark possession prohibited in Louisiana April through June each year for both Recreational and Commercial

Recreational Limits:

- Atlantic Sharpnose and Bonnethead – 1 daily per person with no size limit
- Shortfin Mako – 1 in aggregate per vessel per trip with a male minimum size of 71" fork length and a female minimum size of 83" fork length
- All other sharks – 1 in aggregate per vessel per trip with a minimum size limit of 54" fork length
- 22 prohibited sharks (Atlantic angel, basking, bigeye sand tiger, bigeye sixgill, bigeye thresher, bignose, Caribbean reef, Caribbean sharpnose, dusky, Galapagos, longfin mako, largetooth sawfish, narrowtooth, night, sandbar, sand tiger, sevengill, silky, sixgill, smalltail, whale, and white sharks)

Landings:

- Recreational landings are mostly blacktip sharks (average of 320 per year) and some "unclassified" or unidentified sharks (average of 373 per year) which are likely small coastals such as bonnethead or sharpnose. Occasionally a mako or lemon shark is landed.
- Commercial Landings in most years are confidential due to the small number of dealers. - 2020 All Large Coastal Sharks – 810,027 lbs - 2020 Small Coastal – Confidential - 2020 Pelagic Sharks – 4,412 lbs  
It would help if there was adjustment to the closure period, the limit at 55- open at the limit that the feds open, next year when the season opens instead of being at 45 can we start at 55? An extra month would be really good here and would help everyone out

Possible State Actions:

- Quotas set by NOAA Highly Migratory Species Division and those can't be adjusted

- Altering commercial regulations in state waters that cause overrun of federal quotas could have consequences (federalization of a fishery)
- State closed season for commercial and recreational possession in state waters (April through June) could be altered
- Recreational bag limits in state waters could be altered for some species (blacktip and bull).

Ben Graham stated that he would be in support of trying to change the season or at least supporting a change to the Commission or at least them evaluating this further

David Cresson stated that as a recreational angler have seen a proliferation of sharks, has there been any consideration for how an abundance of sharks affects other species and if so is there a conservation effort to handle this?

Jason Adraince stated that this goes to the overall Gulf of Mexico ecosystem work that NOAA is doing and this will be considered in this work, what we see here are some of the pitfalls of single species management, especially in sharks

Acy Cooper, Jr. stated that extending the date and giving the fishermen more time would help, as you get closer to the summer time you get more and more days, extending the season would help

Acy Cooper, III stated that there is hardly any bycatch, might catch a few gar fish or eels but hardly any bycatch

Daniel Edgar motioned to recommend that the LDWF Commission adjust the current closed season for the harvest of sharks, both recreational and commercial, from April 1<sup>st</sup> through June 30 to May 1<sup>st</sup> through June 30th, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Acy Cooper, III. Motion carries.

B. Jason Adraince led discussion on Southern Flounder management and recent rule making

S. Flounder Issues and Concerns:

- Flounder declines are a broad scale Gulf-wide problem, including the SE Atlantic coast, and are not just a regional overfishing issue (e.g. trout). Problem has more to do with reproduction and recruitment issues than a population undergoing overfishing.
- Options should focus on attempting to recover the stock in light of those reproductive and recruitment issues and not overfishing (i.e. protecting the ability of mature females to escape the fishery to spawn)
- Management options would be most effective if they focus on the time of year that mature female flounder move offshore to spawn (October through December)
- LDWF and the LWFC needs to act in order to attempt to recover the stock within Louisiana waters Next update will be June 2022 on where landings are as of this year

Timeline:

- Presented the 2019 southern flounder assessment in February of 2020, which indicated the stock was overfished and notified the LWFC we would bring forward management options.
- In February of 2021, LDWF presented management options to the LWFC and indicated that the options would be most effective if focused on the time of year mature female move offshore

and require a 50% reduction in harvest of mature females. LWFC asked about different closed season scenarios.

- LDWF staff ran new simulations and concurrently legislation was changed impacting flounder allowing the LWFC to regulate the incidental take of flounder by shrimp trawl gear (R.S. 56:492) when the stock is overfished and/or undergoing overfishing.
- March 2022 – NOI adopted for an annual commercial and recreational closed season with no other size or bag limit changes. S. Flounder Spawning Potential R

#### Legislative Changes:

- Previously the LWFC had no authority to modify the commercial take of southern flounder as bycatch on a shrimping trip by a shrimping vessel per R.S. 56:492.
- During the 2021 Regular Legislative Session, Act 356, LDWF License Restructure, gave the LWFC the authority to adjust the take of southern flounder by shrimping vessels by modifying R.S. 56:492
- “Any commercial shrimping vessel may retain and any commercial fisherman may sell all southern flounder caught as by-catch on any shrimping trip unless the southern flounder stock is determined by the department to be overfished or undergoing overfishing. After such a determination, the commission may adopt rules or regulations in accordance with the Administrative Procedures Act to restrict the retention of southern flounder caught as by-catch on any shrimping trip until such time as the department determines the stock has recovered from an overfished or overfishing status.”

#### Notice of Intent:

- Modifies both LAC 76:VII.351 and LAC 76:VII.353.
- Cleans up unnecessary language relating to temporary closures prior to the entanglement net ban in commercial regulations (LAC 76:VII.351) and subsequent commercial possession and sale regulations.
- Adds language clarifying within commercial regulations when harvest of any and all flounder bycatch (R.S. 56:492) from shrimp gear is allowed, which is during an open shrimp season and only when the season for southern flounder is open.
- Establishes a new annual closed season for the commercial and recreational harvest of southern flounder with any and all gear from October 15th through November 30th of each year in both commercial and recreational rules (LAC 76:VII.351 and LAC 76:VII.353).
- Provides the Secretary the authority to take all necessary steps to effectuate the NOI all the way to final rule.

Temperature at the time the flounder enter the estuary determines sex and seems like the temperature is producing large amounts of males

Acy Cooper, III asked about recreational bag limits

Projections show that the reduction needed can be achieved by just having the closed season from October 15th through November 30th and not having to touch the bag or size limits, the closure would be during the time of year when the mature females are moving offshore to spawn and those are the

ones that need protection; the next flounder assessment will be 2025 and will be presented in February of that year

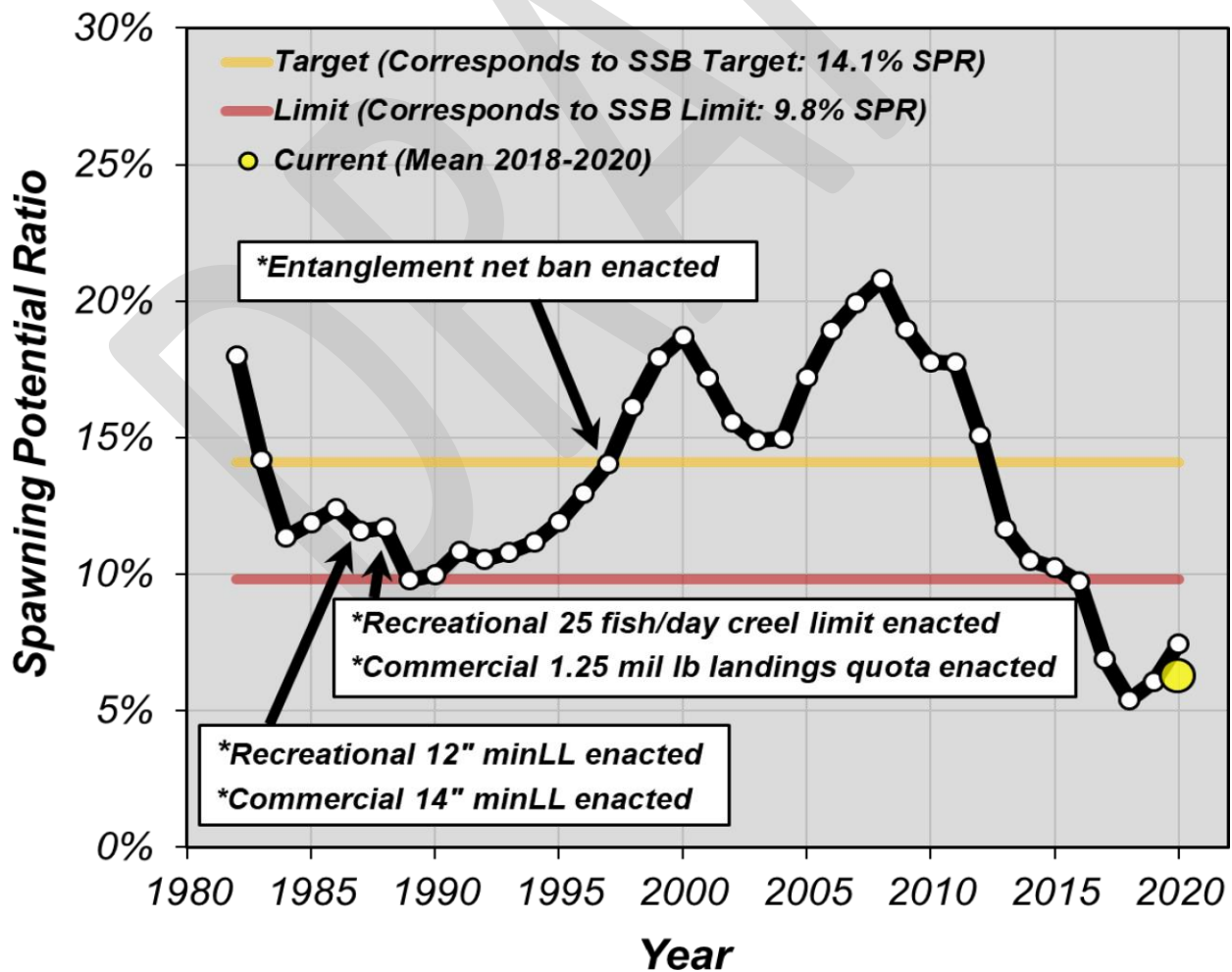
Acy Cooper, Jr. stated that if they do see the stock rebound asked that they consider doing away with the closure

Comment period on the NOI goes through May 2, 2022

C. Jason Adriance provided an update on spotted seatrout stock status

Conservation Measures Timeline:

- 1977: Recreational 50 fish/day creel limit implemented
- 1984: Commercial 12" MinimumLL implemented
- 1987: Recreational 12" MinimumLL implemented
- 1987: Commercial 14" MinimumLL implemented
- 1988: Recreational 25 fish/day creel limit implemented
- 1988: Commercial landings quota implemented
- 1997: Commercial entanglement net ban implemented
- 2022: To be determined



Daniel Edgar stated issues with speckled trout is in trouble and would suggest changing the creel limits, suggested a 12 creel limit and a 14" size limit, this suggestion guarantees a spawn and it's the same amount of meat

Jack Isaacs stated that the average number of trout per trip and how this is so much smaller than the creel limit but none-the-less people seem to favor the high creel limit. Trout are kind of sporadic where every once in a while you get into these sort of runs where you get 15-16 fish, even though this may only happen once in a blue moon it seems like a lot of fishermen want to take advantage of that when they stumble upon it

Jason Adriance stated that LDWF kept getting a lot of feedback from the public that they wanted a 15 fish bag limit, when 15 fish limit was plugged into the model, to get the 20% reduction that was needed to help recover the stock, we would have to go to a 13 ½ size limit

Currently, 83% of the harvest is female, spawn April- September, 50% maturity in female between 8-10 inches, 100% maturity is closer to 14"

Ben Graham stated that the issue with the 13.5" size limit, remembers hearing this being an issue with measuring

Rebecca Triche of LWF 15 limit with 13.5 size limit, would urge the task force to take action on addressing this issue, internally have a bunch of different opinions on the proposed options and came down to the one that is the most popular among the survey, which was the 13 ½ size limit and 15 creel limit, would like to see a task force take some kind of recognition that there is a decline

Ben Graham agrees that pressure from recreational fishermen is a part of it but we would be amiss if we failed to recognize the recruitment in the estuary and degradation of the estuary is the biggest issue

Jack Isaacs stated that two years in a row ran surveys of the public on this issue and there was broader support from the recreational fishermen

Ben Graham stated that he would like to hear the charter industry's feedback on this item; thinks long term that the best answer is management by basin, there are varying views for instance between Grand Isle and Vermillion Bay, just the pressure on the fish and the number of people out there fishing is vastly different

Richard Fischer, of the LA Charter Boat Association, stated that you will find a whole lot of charter captains that would be ok with dropping the limits to 15 and upping the size limits, the consensus among the charter guys is that they feel like something has to be done, but maybe not as quickly or as drastically as some of the options presented; why does it have to be 20% over 5 years, can it be 10 years can it be 5%, a lot of them would be ok with a reasonable reduction in trout- the least unpopular of the choices presented would be the 15 limit and 13.5 size limit option

Daniel Edgar motioned to support making a recreational management change to spotted seatrout that would implement a 13.5" minimum size limit and a 15 fish/day creel limit; but requested that *when LDWF believes that an SPR goal has been reached, that would provide for reasonable harvest of spotted seatrout, that the LDWF Commission consider going back to the original creel and size limits, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Acy Cooper, III.* Motion carries. (Wording in italics added later in the meeting see below)

Later in the meeting a motion was made by Daniel Edgar to amend a motion previously adopted by adding in the wording, *“when LDWF believes that an SPR goal has been reached, that would provide for reasonable harvest, that the LDWF Commission consider going back to the original creel and size limits,* 2<sup>nd</sup> by Acy Cooper, III. Motion carries.

D. Jason Adriance provided an update on Menhaden and the current proposal being considered by LDWF Commission

The NOI would modify the existing rule regarding where in Louisiana waters commercial harvest of Gulf menhaden may occur. The proposed changes would implement a coastwide buffer of ¼ mile from the established inside-outside line (the line that separates Louisiana’s inshore waters from offshore waters).

The NOI was brought forward due to user conflicts between private recreational and charter boat anglers and the commercial menhaden fishery. The Gulf of Mexico stock of menhaden is not overfished and is not undergoing overfishing. Scientific studies have estimated the amount of bycatch of recreationally important species such as red drum and spotted seatrout are minimal, irrespective of the status of those populations.

The NOI was amended, the comment period ended and it is currently in legislative oversight, if it’s approved in oversight and there are no issues then the NOI will be published as final

E. The board heard an update on red snapper

Jason Adriance stated that LDWF will be bringing the 2022 red snapper season to the LDWF Commission at the April meeting, there is a potential for a slight increase in quota in state allocation due to the SSC meeting to set a new annual biological catch, this still has to go through Gulf Council so it’s not in stone yet and if it were to go through looking at an additional 874,000lbs that would be available; season set for the Friday before Memorial Day, which would be May 27 and would open as a weekend only and 2 fish bag limit. However, will provide the LDWF Commission with two other options- 1. Keeping that same weekend only structure and going to a 3 fish bag limit or 2. opening on a daily basis with 2 fish bag limit starting on May 27; The one LDWF is recommended is the daily with the 2 fish bag limit, by going to daily can always later increase the bag limit if the season is going well, didn’t want to come out too hot and potentially shorten the season too much

Ben Graham stated that he would recommend weekends with 3 fish bag limit, if you are going out that far to fish at least you can catch 3 fish; would also help with discards

Daniel Edgar stated that he would support this as well, weekends with a 3 fish bag limit

Stuart Billeaud motioned to support a weekends only (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday) recreational red snapper season with a daily bag limit of three fish per person, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Daniel Edgar. Motion carries.

F. The board discussed the national bait shortage

Daniel Edgar stated that he started LA Bait Company in 2009, made an effort to deal with the bait shortage that LA was facing, 2010 BP happened, after BP was on the Seafood Advisory Board and informed LDWF that 90% of the bait being using in LA was coming from the east coast, there were no more bait companies left in the Gulf of Mexico

The board was presented a video from LA Bait Company doing a set, there was a lot of concern and testimony about bycatch and these boats catching speckled trout, the video showed little bycatch and no speckled trout in the sets, there was so much talk and misunderstanding of what these nets catch, wanted to provide some footage of some actual sets and what is caught, what is available for bait now is shrinking and a lot of species that used to be used for bait are now being eaten, do not have the freezer capacity and is a long way from supplying LA with the amount of bait needed, will face this challenge again next year unless something changes, fishermen cannot pay any more than they currently are for bait; wanted the recreational fishermen and people in the industry to understand the issues and this fishery a little better

G. Jason Froeba provided an update on the status of the Louisiana Fishing Recovery Community Coalition

Since Hurricane Ida, the industry reached out to LDWF and asked to set up an industry recovery coalition, Harlon Pearce heads it, there was no limitation on who can participate, meet every two weeks, what needs to be done to assess damages and what can be done, came up with an estimate of damages from 2020 hurricanes, from this report started putting together a white paper of industry needs and the costs associated, white paper is going through approvals and once approved will be going to DC to lobby for money, covered basic industry issues- down vessels, hang gear fund, primary goal has been how do we recover from storms and how can we get funding, and at the point now working with advisors to get to DC to start working on the funding to get this going

Ben Graham stated that it has been pretty impressive, took some of the stuff after Hurricane Katrina to streamline the process, could use a lot of

H. Gene Cavalier provided an update on the USDA Covid-19 Grant Program

Eligible beneficiaries- Louisiana residents possessing any of the following LA Dept. of Wildlife and Fisheries licenses in 2020 and/or 2021:

- Residential Wholesale/Retail Seafood License- business
- Residential Wholesale/Retail Seafood License- vehicle
- Residential Seafood Retail/Dealer License- business
- Residential Seafood Retail/Dealer License- vehicle
- Residential Vessel License

Will begin taking applications from July 1- 29, 2022 (all applications must be delivered or post-marked no later than July 29, 2022)

Awarded amounts- Up to \$100,000 based on approval and availability of funds. If, after the close of the application period, the total request for funds exceeds the program allocation, the state will use a pro-rata allocation process to make individual awards. Based on program demand at the close of the application process, the state will announce the final pro-rata formula and allocation if it is found to be necessary.

Disbursement- single or multiple payments, depending on the availability of funds.

Method- electronic funds transfer (EFT) unless check is requested by applicant



Eligibility- In order to be eligible for the benefits under the Louisiana Seafood Processors Pandemic Response and Safety Program, an applicant must meet the following requirements:

- Must have had a 2020 and/or 2021 Louisiana Residential Wholesale/Retail Seafood License – Business, Residential Wholesale/Retail Seafood License -Vehicle, Residential Seafood Retail/Dealer License – Business, Residential Seafood-Retail/Dealer License – Vehicle, or Residential Vessel Licenses issued by the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries.
- Sole proprietorships, partnerships (general, limited, or LLP), corporations (S Corps, C Corps, and LLCs), cooperatives, joint ventures, and other entities may participate. Processors and At-sea Processors attest that they change the physical condition of a fisheries resource suitable for human consumption, retail sale, industrial use, or long-term storage including cooking, canning, smoking, salting, drying, shucking, filleting, freezing, or rendering into meal or oil.
- Dealers attest that they receive fish by way of purchase and sell directly to restaurants, markets, other dealers, processors, or consumers without substantially altering the product.

#### Award

Awards will be 100 % grants. Total awards will be a maximum of \$100,000 depending on the availability of funds. The applicant's award amount will be based on the amount of pandemic-related loss expenses preparing for, preventing exposure to, and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic for seafood processing facilities and vessels. If eligible requests for funds exceed the dollars available, awards will be made on a pro-rata share.

The applicant will be responsible for submitting receipts for the use of funds in order to receive the grant award. Please attach any receipts relating to these expenses to the application. Receipts must be dated January 27, 2020, through December 31, 2021, and indicate payments have already been made. LDAF/LAFA may request expense justification for eligible expenses.

Estimate that funds will go out around March 2023-May 2023

For more information on the program details, visit <http://www.ldaf.la.us/louisiana-seafood-processors-pandemic-response-and-safety-block-grant-program/>

Daniel Edgar asked if they can look into the difference between the two programs for commercial fishermen and agriculture

- I. The board held officer elections

Daryl Simon motioned to elect Ben Graham as chairman of the task force and Stuart Billeaud as the Vice Chairman of the board, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Daniel Edgar. Motion carries.

#### **VII. Public Comment**

Richard Fischer requested that the board consider making a small amendment to the spotted sea trout motion to add in a sunset that is attached to some metric, SPR for example, if we get to the point where trout is rebuilt by whatever metrics we choose, we go back to the way it was before

Daniel Edgar motioned to amend a motion previously adopted by adding in the wording, *“when LDWF believes that an SPR goal has been reached, that would provide for reasonable harvest, that the LDWF Commission consider going back to the original creel and size limits, to the original motion, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Acy Cooper, III.* Motion carries.

The amended motion would now read: Daniel Edgar motioned to support making a recreational management change to spotted seatrout that would implement a 13.5" minimum size limit and a 15 fish/day creel limit; but requested that *when LDWF believes that an SPR goal has been reached, that would provide for reasonable harvest of spotted seatrout, that the LDWF Commission consider going back to the original creel and size limits*, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Acy Cooper, III. Motion carries with 5 to 1 vote, Daryl Simon voted against the motion.

IX. Next meeting date set for Wednesday, June 22, 2022 for 10 am in Houma.

X. Motion to adjourn by Steve Rockweiler, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Stuart Billeaud. Motion carries.

DRAFT