

Oyster Task Force Meeting
Wednesday, January 14, 2026 10:00am
New Orleans Lakefront Airport
6001 Stars and Stripes Blvd.
New Orleans, LA

- I. Pledge of Allegiance
- II. Roll call and introduction of guests

Voting Members Present:

Mitch Jurisich
Brad Robin
Brandt Lafrance
Al Sunseri
Steve Pollock
Peter Vujnovich
Sam Slavich
Shane Bagala
Jakov Jurisic
Matthew Slavich

Voting Members Absent:

Brandon Debarge
Willie Daisy

Non-Voting Members Present:

Robert Caballero
Davis Madere
Kyle Balkum
Brian Lezina

Non-Voting Members Absent:

Bryan Wallace

III. Brad Robin motioned to approve the November 12, 2025 meeting minutes, 2nd by Brandt Lafrance. Motion carries.

Brad Robin motioned to approve the January 14, 2026 meeting agenda, 2nd by Peter Vujnovich. Motion carries.

IV. Treasury Report

Remaining Fund Balance- \$608,511
Remaining Budget Balance- \$110,168

Peter Vujnovich motioned to accept the treasury report as presented, 2nd by Brad Robin. Motion carries.

- A. Public- Private Oyster Seed Grounds Committee- No report

B. Enforcement Report- Major Davis Madere provided the enforcement report

Terrebonne

1 - Commission rules and regs (fail to tag oysters prior to leaving seed grounds) in Terrebonne sister lake, approximately 40 lbs of oysters seized.

1 - 56:499 A failure to fill out oyster tags correctly Terrebonne with no seizures

1 - 56:435 use illegal dredge (dive plate on the seed ground) Terrebonne parish, sister lake, 18 sacks seized

1 - 56:433.1 violate seed ground vessel permit, Not abiding by commission rules and regulations (Fail to report harvest from public seed ground), and violate sanitation code (log book) Terrebonne parish sister lake, approximately 3000 lbs seized and returned to the water

1 - 56:433.1 violate seed ground vessel permit Terrebonne parish sister lake, approximately 1200 lbs seized and returned to the water

St. Bernard

1---RS 56:433.1 – Violate Seed Ground Vessel Permit Regulations (no Gear License)

1---RS 56:326.3 – Not Abiding by Commission Rules and Regulations (Fail To report)

2---RS 40:4A – Violate Sanitation Code (Log Book)

2---RS 56:449A - Failure to fill out Oyster Tags Correctly

2---RS 56:326.3 – Not Abiding by Commission Rules and Regulations (Failure to report)

3---RS 56:326.3 – Not Abiding By Commission Rules and Regulations (Failure to Report)

2---RS 56:326.3 - Not Abiding by Commission Rules and Regulations (Failure to report) Warnings

Seizures- 75 Sacks of Oysters seized in connection with these violations

C. Legislative Report – Brad Robin provided the legislative report

Brad Robin stated that the task force members discussed adding another member to the task force from the Department of Agriculture and Forestry during the legislative committee meeting. Mitch Jurisich stated that the task force needs a motion to accept the recommendation from the committee.

Jakov Jurisic motioned to accept adding a seat to the task force for a representative from the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, 2nd by Al Sunseri. None opposed, motion carries.

Mitch Jurisich stated that Representative Braud will handle sponsoring the request to add a new seat. Mitch Jurisich stated that he sits on the Natural Resource Committee.

D. Legal Report - No report

E. Research Committee- No report

F. Coastal Restoration Committee – No report

Captain George Ricks stated that he and Brad Robin attended the Caernarvon Interagency Advisory Committee annual meeting for operations on December 12, 2025. Captain George Ricks stated that there was a unanimous vote to keep the same operational regime as last year with the same salinity thresholds (5ppt trigger at Snake Island).

Peter Vujnovich reiterated that the operational plan will be the same as last year. Peter Vujnovich stated that the salinity levels fluctuates throughout the year and during the colder months the salinity can get down to 5ppt. Peter Vujnovich stated that there was a presentation on computer-generated oyster modeling which calculated distribution patterns.

Robert Caballero stated that the company who presented the oyster modeling is a contractor for the department that will be giving a presentation to the task force once final approvals are received. Robert Caballero stated that LDWF is using past data to run the model.

Patrick Banks stated that LDWF reached out to the company to develop the model but LDWF has not had a chance to meet internally to review the results. Patrick Banks stated that the department fears that the model will predict larval settlement in certain parts of the bay that may not reflect the actual settlement. Patrick Banks stated that the contractor did not meet with members of the industry before LDWF had a change to finalize the information.

Earl Melancon asked of the modeling was completed for each basin.

Patrick Banks stated that the modeling is not basin by basin but it is specifically for Barataria Bay.

Earl Melancon recommended that if something like the modeling that is specific for Barataria Bay should be part of a research committee meeting before the full task for meeting for more in-depth discussions.

G. Marketing Committee

Greg Beuerman stated that all the preparations for the restaurant and guest lists were completed. Greg Beuerman asked the task force member to let their other constituents know about the event. Greg Beuerman stated that there are a number of sponsors this year who provided financial contributions to help cover the costs. Greg Beuerman stated the Let the World Be Your Oyster (LTWBYO) event will take place in Washington, DC on Wednesday, January 28, 2026 from 6:00PM to 8:00PM.

Al Sunseri asked if it was possible that media coverage could be present at the LTWBYO event to provide possible media for the Louisiana Oyster Task Force.

Mitch Jurisich asked where would be media coverage take place.

Al Sunseri stated that [BMF] could work the Dauphine's and in the past the task force worked with Acadiana to do something at their venue. Al Sunseri stated that previously some of the media coverage took place within the halls of Congress and some of the task force members met with the media directly.

Greg Beuerman stated that some the current sponsor included Venture Global, West Bank Fishing, Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board, and St. Bernard Parish. Greg Beuerman stated that last year there are a one-pager with information and they are working on a white paper for this year.

Al Sunseri stated they are currently working on a draft and one of the issues is on automation dealing with harvesting, handling, and processing. Al Sunseri stated that the labor force for is at a critical mass and there could be people to develop AI and robotics through the administration. Al Sunseri stated that one of the other items is the responsibilities of state and federal agencies being conscientious about the information they are putting out.

H. Health Committee

Jennifer Armentor stated that LDH had to update green tag hours of refrigeration for the month of April. Jennifer Armentor stated that coming up in April, green tags will now have a 12-hour refrigeration requirement and not an 18-hour. Jennifer Armentor stated that the problem was that there were different basins and the FDA wanted hours of refrigeration for each basin (growing area) so LDH implemented a requirement that would cover the entire state regardless of basin. Jennifer Armentor stated that the change would be easier to follow and enforce. Jennifer Armentor stated that the NSSP changed in 2022 that required the use of air temperature measurements for green tags but white tags still used water temperature. Jennifer Armentor stated that LDH updated their code using air temperatures and used data from each basin that averaged the monthly maximum air temperature to come up with the green tag requirement that falls into the NSSP chart. Jennifer Armentor stated that the FDA would not allow them to use the basin by basin data and LDH had to use the maximum of the entire state maximum. Jennifer Armentor stated that in April 2023 the temperatures were really hot and raised the 5 year average data that moved the time to a Category 4 which requires 12 hours.

Mitch Jurisich stated that now April is actually a cooler that it used to be in the past and now May usually gets cool fronts. Mitch Jurisich stated that it is ironic that one year would make such a difference. Mitch Jurisich stated that cold fronts are coming down later and it stays warmer later even into October.

Jennifer Armentor stated that initially FDA wanted to include other months but the statistician reran the numbers and only April had a delineation.

Al Sunseri stated that LDH should use only the temperatures during harvest hours because harvesting usually occurs earlier in the day when the water temperatures and the air temperatures are at their lowest. Al Sunseri stated that there should be enough data to justify using the harvest hours.

Jennifer Armentor stated that LDH is allowed to use entire state and not each basin because if one basin has hours for refrigeration and then another one has different hours it can be too complicated. Jennifer Armentor stated that in order to use the entire state LDH had to use the maximum of the max temperature for the day.

Al Sunseri stated that the argument could be made to the ISSC and/or the federal government to use the harvest hours that would be accurate and helpful to the industry. Al Sunseri stated that people are not harvesting at 3:00PM, 4:00PM, or 5:00PM when it's the hottest.

Jennifer Armentor stated that the NSSP says to use the average monthly maximum temperature of the maximum temperature for the month.

Al Sunseri stated that LDH could still make an argument to use the harvest hours because they have the power to determine what they want to do and it would be no different than the seasonal maps. Al Sunseri stated that by using the harvest time you could see a difference of 10 to 15 degrees.

Jennifer Armentor stated that LDH tried to use the average of the max when they were initially cited from the FDA. Jennifer Armentor stated that after a review the data had to be revised to use the max of the max and not the average of the max. Jennifer Armentor stated that if LDH changed the requirement by basin for harvest hours it would be very complicated and also change the entire method. Jennifer Armentor stated that different hours of refrigeration would not be feasible for harvesters, enforcement, and inspectors. Jennifer Armentor stated that LDH's program would get cited with deficiencies if they don't properly follow the NSSP.

Al Sunseri stated that other states have been able to win arguments such as processing on mud flats whereas other areas of the country don't allow that.

Jakov Jurisic asked what the intent of making the regulation changes is and had anyone ever gotten sick eating cooked oysters.

Jennifer Armentor stated that she's not sure but LDH receives reports but she's not sure if it's from the oyster and would be from some other kind of way.

Jakov Jurisic stated that fried oysters could be from cross contamination. Jakov Jurisic stated that green tag oysters are intended for cooking only so why do they have an 8,10, or 12 hours refrigeration requirement.

Jennifer Armentor stated that LDH must follow the matrix that is in the NSSP.

Jakov Jurisic stated that he does not see the point if there are warnings on the tags and he doesn't see the reason to reduce vibrio in cooked oysters. Jakov Jurisic asked if they could make the green tags change a discussion for the next ISSC meeting.

Al Sunseri stated that the state has the authority to push back and override the recommendations set in the NSSP.

Robert Caballero stated that LDH provided the updates back in December but LDWF also updated the oyster harvesting tag website. Robert Caballero stated that LDWF also has posters available to print for dealers or oyster fishermen.

Brad Robin asked did LDH have any reported illnesses for green tag oysters even with the warnings.

Jennifer Armentor stated that LDH has gotten reports of illness for green tags. Jennifer Armentor stated the NSSP requires the use of the average monthly maximum air temperatures and when entered into the database whatever category it falls into determines the hours of

refrigeration. Jennifer Armentor stated that in the past LDH used the wrong temperatures which were corrected and the hours to refrigerate were changed.

Mitch Jurisich stated that this issue should be discussed further during a committee meeting.

Jakov Jurisic stated that he saw a commercial in which people were picking oysters from the shore and then just eating them. Jakov Jurisic asked would could be done about misconceptions like this.

Steve Pollock stated that the commercial was probably from an aquaculture oyster farm where some states allows for this. Steve Pollock stated that he believes the hours of refrigeration should be keep as is to allow for warmer temperature changes.

Jakov Jurisic stated that the oyster industry is being scrutinized unlike any other industry and when something like this commercial comes up there is nothing that can be done.

Al Sunseri asked Jennifer Armentor to assist with setting up a meeting with FDA and LDH. Al Sunseri stated that he's heard that the ISSC may go away and there would be no cooperative program.

Jennifer Armentor stated that the FDA will accept the state's single state-wide average monthly maximum if LDH uses the approach where the daily value is the maximum high temperature recorded among all of the weather stations representing the entire state. Jennifer Armentor stated that this is the result of the AMMIT is higher than the other AMMITs which would be calculated for each individual area.

I. Aquaculture Report- No report

J. Joint Task Force Working Group- no report

VI. New Business:

A. To Hear an Update on the Current Oyster Season – LDWF

Robert Caballero provided the task force with the current oyster season report below.

Table 1. Harvest estimates for the 2025-2026 oyster season on Louisiana’s public oyster areas as of 1/05/2026. Harvest estimates are based on either LDWF conducted surveys of oyster harvesting vessels during the oyster season or from daily harvest reporting requirement via eReporting application.

CSA	Area	Season Opening	Season Closure	Season/ Type	Days open to Date	eReporting Harvest	Boarding Report Harvest	Vessels Harvesting
1	POSG East of Mississippi river and North of MRGO	29-Sep-25	1-Oct-25	Bedding season	3	8,375 bbl	9,815 bbl	20
		3-Nov-25	1-Apr-26	Market harvest	64	39,340 sacks	51,846 sacks	76
	Lake Fortuna/Machias	3-Nov-25	28-Nov-25	Market harvest	26	170 sacks	319 sacks	6
5	Sister Lake	29-Sep-25	29-Sep-25	Bedding season	1	550 bbl	3,660 bbl	18
		3-Nov-25	14-Nov-25	Market harvest	12	3,373 sacks	5,307 sacks	65
		10-Dec-25	29-Dec-25	Market harvest	20	9,403 sacks	9,698 sacks	47
6	Vermilion/East and West Cote Blanche Bay/Atchafalaya Bay	8-Sep-25	1-April-26	Bedding season	120	0	0	0
		13-Oct-25	1-April-26	Market harvest	85	0	0	0
7	Calcasieu Lake	1-Jan-25	30-Apr-26	east side: Market harvest	5	0	0	0
		1-Nov-25	30-Apr-26	West Cove: Market harvest	66	0	0	0
Total Harvest for the 2025-2026 Oyster Season				Bedding Season		8,925 bbl	13,475 bbl	18*/38**
				Market Harvest		52,286 sacks	67,170 sacks	128*/147**

* Total vessels eReporting for a harvest season.

** Total vessels observed in boarding runs by CSA biologists.

Table 2. eReporting harvest summary for the 2025-2026 oyster season on Louisiana’s public oyster areas.

LDH Area	Activity	Volume	Number of Vessels Harvesting	Harvest Trips
Zone 1	Bedding	0 bbl	0	0
	Sacking	660 sacks	7	22
Zone 2	Bedding	8,375 bbl	16	36
	Sacking	6,730 sacks	29	226
Zone 3	Sacking	31,950 sacks	74	1,093
Zone 4	Sacking	0 sacks	0	0
Zone 5	Sacking	170 sacks	5	10
Zone 19	Bedding	550 bbl	2	2
	Sacking	12,776 sacks	54	456
Zone 29	Sacking	0 sacks	0	0
Zone 30	Sacking	0 sacks	0	0
Grand Total	Bedding	8,925 bbl	18	38
	Sacking	52,286 sacks	128	1,807

Table 3. CSA Boarding run harvest summary for the 2025-2026 oyster season on Louisiana's public oyster areas.

CSA	LDH Oyster Harvest Area	Seed barrel totals to date	Market Sack totals to date	Total Vessels Market Harvesting	Total Vessels Seed Harvesting
CSA 1N	Area 1	1,690	3,100	.	20
CSA 1N	Area 2	8,125	8,464	.	
CSA 1N	Area 3	n/a	40,282	.	n/a
CSA 1N	Area 4	n/a	0	0	n/a
CSA 1N	Total	9,815	51,846	76	20
CSA 1S	Area 5	n/a	319	6	n/a
CSA5W	Area 19	3,660	15,005	72	18
CSA 6	Area 24-28	0	0	0	0
CSA 7 (East Side)	Area 29	n/a	0	0	n/a
CSA 7 (West Cove)	Area 30	n/a	0	0	n/a
Total		13,475 bbl	67,170 sacks	147	38

Mitch Jurisich asked if there was still a lack of e-reporting compliance.

Robert Caballero stated that LDWF Marine has been working with enforcement in different areas and some areas are doing well such as the Pontchartrain area. Robert Caballero stated that day-to-day more people are reporting than they are actually seeing. Robert Caballero stated that there's still a couple that might miss a day or two but they do back report. Robert Caballero stated that some areas like sister lake were slow to comply but LDWF now has a higher compliance rating.

Jakov Jurisic stated that in some areas there was a major problem with lack of telephone service.

Robert Caballero stated that as long as you register for the e-reporting app within cell phone range you do not need cell phone coverage to report. Robert Caballero stated that when the information is entered it generates a report in your phone that can be shown to agents but you have until 9:00PM of the same day to report. Robert Caballero stated that when you get back into cell phone range the app sends the data but you have to register when you have a signal. Robert Caballero stated that citations have been issued for people that have been harvesting but have not made any attempts to e-report.

Major Davis Madere stated that enforcement uses their discretion in certain situations and they are aware that some areas lack cell phone service.

Shane Bagala asked if the department had any plans on opening Sister Lake.

Robert Caballero stated that the department is evaluating the health plans but it should probably open.

Brad Robin requested that Sister Lake be opened longer because the sales of oysters are real slow right now and there aren't many boats working in the area.

Robert Caballero stated that there was a longer season in December because they didn't have as many vessels that were anticipated from the first opening. Robert Caballero stated that usually there are around 80 vessels but the count was 65 in the first opening then dropped to 47 in the second opening.

B. To Discuss an Updated Proposal and Consider Funding for SeaD Consulting Seafood Testing – David Williams, SeaD Consulting

David Williams stated that during the last task force meeting several questions arose regarding imports and SeaD Consulting did some market research to take a look at what's going on in the market. David

Williams stated that the goal is to reduce the amount of substitution of imported products that are taking away the sales and what they found was pretty alarming. David Williams stated that the first question that came up was will testing capture the Canadian and/or West Coast grown oyster market. David Williams stated that this would not be a problem because there is no market for frozen Canadian oysters.

David Williams stated they obtained 9 samples of imported oysters easily without any great effort. David Williams stated that there are two main areas where imported oysters are coming in from, Korea and China. David Williams stated that Korea has similar regulations [to the U.S.] with regard to water quality but China does not follow those same guidelines. David Williams stated that one of the imports from Korea operates under Central Fisheries Co., LTD which accounts for 1.2 million pounds of meat and another importer accounted for 920,000. David Williams stated that they only found two importers but there could be more. David Williams stated that around 2 million pounds of meat is imported. David Williams stated that when they looked at historical data for how much oysters were being grown it was considerably more.

David Williams stated that there is some value-added items coming out of China and being sold under Boudreaux Brand, King and Price (Mrs. Friday's Brand), and Pafco. David Williams stated that the largest producer of oysters in China is a company called Yuanxian Foods. David Williams stated that he believes the producer import a large volume of items and their website states they produce around 500 tons per month. David Williams stated that the producer is also offering a half-shell frozen oyster.

David Williams stated that SeaD consulting has collected samples from the products they found and they are from *Gigas* oysters. David Williams stated that he is confident that SeaD Consulting can easily develop a test to identify the species.

Mitch Jurisich stated that from the information provided there is an issue with imports in the oyster industry. Mitch Jurisich stated that the industry should take another step to resolve the issue with oyster imports and let the general public know. Mitch Jurisich asked if they should spend money for testing or do more research so they can start a campaign to let the general public know about imports. Mitch Jurisich stated that there is nothing currently now to protect the oyster industry.

David Williams stated that the industry can leverage publicity from the development of the test. David Williams stated that SeaD consulting has not paid for any publicity and has been featured on Inside Edition and the Wall Street Journal.

Mitch Jurisich stated that right now some of the labeling laws are only specific to crawfish and shrimp in restaurants.

Jakov Jurisic asked does SeaD consulting have a dollar amount to develop the in-field test.

David Williams stated that they presented a proposal to develop a test with the capabilities of results in 2 hours called the "Right Test" which is a portable test that looks for specific RNA.

Al Sunseri stated that it would be a good idea to start looking at what's going on in the Louisiana Marketplace. Al Sunseri asked if laws would have to be changed to do the same thing as shrimp and crawfish.

David Williams stated that the testing from SeaD Consulting showed proof that there was an issue that helped legislation get passed for the shrimp industry.

Steve Pollock asked if the legislation could be changed to simply add oysters for the labeling regulations.

Mitch Jurisich stated that one of the things he is looking at is how much are the imported oysters being sold in restaurants and if they are using an inflated price but getting the product for cheaper.

Al Sunseri motioned to support funding to produce the test and also do the sampling within the state of Louisiana, 2nd by Jakov Jurisic.

Mitch Jurisich opened the floor for discussions.

David Williams stated that the total cost to develop the genetic test is \$29,500.

Jakov Jurisic asked who would own the equipment for the testing.

David Williams stated that SeaD consulting would own the test and would develop the protocol to identify the specific piece of RNA that is unique to each species. David Williams stated that they would also complete peer review validation.

Jakov Jurisic asked if the sampling is included in the \$29,500 costs.

David Williams stated that the proposal is only for the development of the test and does not include the sampling at restaurants.

Earl Melancon asked if SeaD consulting would own the patent for the development of the test.

David Williams stated that they currently have a workflow path ready ("Right Test") but it requires a specific reagent for the specific species identification and that is what they are looking to develop. David Williams stated that the same test that is used for shrimp will be used for oysters. David Williams stated that they must first obtain the right piece of RNA, replicate it and identify it against other similar species.

Earl Melancon asked that once the test is developed is there a way for a state agency to become involved in any type of testing or would that be something that they would have to pay for.

David Williams stated that their whole object is to get state agencies to use their testing to enforce food and menu labeling. David Williams stated that if LDAF wanted the test, they would have to purchase the equipment and reagents from SeaD Consulting.

Gene Cavalier stated that SeaD Consulting tests may not hold up in a judiciary system and LDAF has a computerized program to do random samples with non-biased abilities.

Steve Pollock asked if we were discussing the motion to fund SeaD Consulting and how he could oppose the motion. Steve Pollock stated that he questioned whether the task force should spend \$30,000 to convince the public not to eat Chinese oysters. Steve Pollock stated that he agrees that information for imported oysters should be disseminated but asked who is testing working for shrimp and crawfish on the menus right now.

Mitch Jurisich stated that right now there is nothing that says restaurants have to label their menus for oysters and the testing could at least get labels on the menu for imported oysters from China or wherever. Mitch Jurisich stated that there is a lack of information regarding imported oysters and people are not even aware of what they are eating.

Steve Pollock asked if the task force would consider just adding oysters to the labeling regulations.

Mitch Jurisich stated that in order for legislation to be changed, the task force would need some type of proof to move forward.

Dr. John "Zach" Lea stated that the industry would not need proof to amend the labeling regulations.

Mitch Jurisich stated that proof would be needed or the task force would open up itself to litigation.

Kyle Balkum stated that the industry is getting worse and the amount of sales and revenue has significantly decreased. Kyle Balkum stated that \$30,000 for the test development compared to the millions of dollars of loss for oyster sales is a very small amount.

Gene Cavalier stated that this should be a topic of discussion for the Seafood Safety Task Force meeting.

Steve Pollock asked since SeaD Consulting proposal is for R&D, what would be the additional monthly cost per test.

David Williams stated that the monthly testing would be around \$18,000 that includes a complete market analysis and collecting samples.

A member of the audience stated that the testing does have value and he knows people in Indiana who have heard about the shrimp testing. The audience member stated that it does have a large impact and oysters need the same thing.

Mitch Jurisich opened the floor to vote on the motion to support funding to produce the test and also do the sampling within the state of Louisiana. None opposed. Motion carries.

Al Sunseri motioned to request legislation to change crawfish and shrimp to seafood, 2nd by Brad.

Mitch Jurisich stated that changing the legislation to all seafood could cause chaos in the industry and could impact imported fish.

Peter Vujnovich stated that the motion should be just for oysters and not all seafood.

Al Sunseri made a substitute motion to request legislation to add oysters to existing seafood labeling regulations, 2nd by Brad Robin. All in favor, none opposed. Motion carries.

C. To Discuss the Salmonella Outbreak in Oysters – OTF and LDH

Mitch Jurisich stated that cross contamination with raw meat could be a source of salmonella in Oysters but seemed highly unlikely due to restaurants not storing their raw oysters in the same fridge as raw meat. Mitch Jurisich stated that birds could have contributed to the outbreak of salmonella.

Jennifer Armentor stated that Salmonella originates in the digestive tract of birds.

Mitch Jurisich stated the caged and intertidal oysters could have been exposed to salmonella by inland birds. Mitch Jurisich asked where the outbreak originated from.

Jennifer Armentor stated that Louisiana did not have any illnesses

Mitch Jurisich asked if any oysters from Louisiana caused illnesses.

Jennifer Armentor stated that it is not clear if Louisiana oysters caused any illnesses, but Louisiana oyster tags were involved in some investigations. Jennifer Armentor stated the outbreak started in June

with further cases in August and December. Jennifer Armentor stated the December case had Louisiana tags mixed in with other states tags.

Mitch Jurisich asked which area did the cases come from.

Jennifer Armentor stated that the cases came from area 3 but were unable to identify the exact location due to repacking by out of state dealers.

Mitch Jurisich stated that the sacks came from different states and were dumped together making it harder to identify the source of the contamination. Mitch Jurisich stated that commingling oysters is not allowed in Louisiana, but it can happen when oysters are shipped outside of the state.

Al Sunseri asked how the oysters were served at the restaurants where infections occurred.

Jennifer Armentor stated that oysters from different states could have been served on the same plate, but no restaurant inspections were conducted to confirm this information.

Al Sunseri stated that most of the cases were in the Northeast where Louisiana does not typically sell oysters. Al Sunseri stated that there are no reported cases in Louisiana.

Jennifer Armentor stated that a source for the outbreak has not been identified. Jennifer Armentor stated that the circumstances of these cases did meet the requirements of an outbreak. Jennifer Armentor stated that the NSSP says that when there is an outbreak the epidemiologist in the state where the outbreak occurred decides if the outbreaks occurred by oysters and which harvest area it came from. Jennifer Armentor stated that due to the ambiguity of multiple states tags being involved in the cases none of the states were able to go forward in identifying where the salmonella originated from.

Al Sunseri stated that our oysters are not in the states where major outbreaks occurred such as Pennsylvania, New York and New Jersey.

Steve Pollock stated that Wilson and Moore conducted a study that showed 80% of 433 shellfish contain salmonella. Steve Pollock stated that harvesting areas have become more polluted with more human sewage discharge into coastal water leading to increase pathogens. Steve Pollock stated that the paper also mentioned cattle runoff as a major source of pollution, but there was no mention of birds in the article.

Steve Pollock stated that he will be attending a meeting with the ISSC FDA to discuss the salmonella situation. Steve Pollock stated that not all the people who contracted salmonella had consumed oysters.

Mitch Jurisich stated that most people get sick from a salmonella infection and salmonella does not just infect the immunocompromised.

A member of the audience asked if there was salmonella outbreak in 22 different states.

Mitch Jurisich stated that it may have been more than that amount.

A member of the audience asked what the timeframe for this outbreak was.

Jennifer Armentor stated that the first case started in June and she was unaware of it being related to the August case.

Al Sunseri stated that two or more cases at one time are needed to be considered an outbreak. Al Sunseri stated that the scattered nature of the outbreak made it hard to detect.

Jennifer Armentor stated that she was not made aware of the outbreak until the CDC declared it one in December.

A member of the audience stated that testing in area 3 could show whether salmonella contamination occurred at the area where it was harvested or from the redistribution of oyster by dealers. A member of the audience stated that based on these findings it could be publicized that Louisiana oysters did not cause the outbreak.

Jennifer Armentor stated that no testing was done because there was no link to a specific area with first case. Jennifer Armentor stated that since the case was not directly linked to Louisiana no testing was done as there was no need to disprove the cases.

David Williams stated that he did not see any statistical relevance in this being an outbreak due to the wide range of cases across the United States.

A member of the audience stated that he thinks the oyster's contamination could have come from foreign imports and oysters harvested in other states.

Jennifer Armentor stated that it is difficult to identify the source since the oysters came from multiple sources.

Mitch Jurisich stated that Louisiana oysters were implicated in this case because of the ambiguity of the source of the oyster contamination.

A member of the audience stated that oyster contamination could have occurred at an oyster processing plant.

Mitch Jurisich stated that there would be a bigger push to disprove the rumors of contamination if there were no suspected oysters that originated from Louisiana. Mitch Jurisich stated that the source of the infections probably originated outside of Louisiana.

Al Sunseri stated that the Louisiana oysters should not be included in the outbreak because infections were spread apart and Louisiana oyster tags were only suspected in one case in some instances.

D. Officer Elections – OTF

Mitch Jurisich asked if anyone would like to make a nomination.

Brad Robin motioned to keep the current administration as it is currently 2nd by Jakov Jurisic. Motion Carries.

E. To Discuss the LSU Research Publication of New Forecasting Models for *Vibrio vulnificus*- OTF

Al Sunseri asked if the committee could go to executive session to discuss the matter further. Al Sunseri stated that no one from LSU was present at the meeting to discuss the issue.

Mitch Jurisich stated that an executive session is not necessary.

Jakov Jurisic asked if an executive session was held, would the webinar be recording.

Mitch Jurisich stated that the webinar would be turned off during the executive session. Mitch Jurisich stated that there is no legally binding action that would require an executive session.

Al Sunseri stated that based on what the discussion could be about it would warrant an executive session.

Patrick Banks stated that to hold one there needs to be more specificity as to why an executive session is taking place.

Al Sunseri stated this matter met with the legal clarification of collective bargaining and for litigation when an open meeting would have detrimental effects on the bargaining or litigation position of the public.

Mitch Jurisich stated that there are no legally binding issues now in regard to this issue.

Steve Pollock asked if the committee could discuss the contents of the paper.

Al Sunseri stated that the people who wrote and published the paper are not at the meeting and the committee is unable to ask them questions. Al Sunseri stated that he would like to question LSU why this information was published and discuss its impact on the oyster industry.

Steve Pollock stated that the agenda item is to discuss the paper and he does not see a problem doing that in the presence of the public. Steve Pollock states that he was unaware of the potential legal issues that could come from this paper.

Mitch Jurisich stated that the purpose of an executive session is to keep legally binding information confidential. Mitch Jurisich stated that there is currently no legal action being taken so the committee should not go into executive session.

Al Sunseri stated that there were previous incidents of an executive session taking place without ongoing litigation. Al Sunseri stated that this conversation could lead to litigation and that was the reason for holding an executive session.

Patrick Banks stated that there must be a majority vote to hold an executive session and believes Al Sunseri is correct in his reasoning of the session based on potential future litigation. Patrick Banks stated that it would not be appropriate to only discuss the contents of the paper in an executive session.

Al Sunseri stated that they would not just be discussing the contents of the paper because no one from LSU was present to hold a discussion.

Steve Pollock stated that he discussed the paper with Dr. Deng and was willing to share the information he gained.

Al Sunseri motion to hold an executive session 2nd by Jakov Jurisic.

Roll call vote failed to reach 2/3 majority. Motion failed.

Mitch Jurisich asked if they should still hold a discussion.

Al Sunseri asked to defer the discussion and try to get the authors to attend the next meeting.

Mitch Jurisich asked if anyone could reach out to the authors.

Steve Pollock mentioned redirecting their grievances toward LSU and not at the researchers who did not intend for the downstream effects. Steve Pollock stated that that LSU was in the wrong and that the research itself is unbiased.

Mitch Jurisich stated that the publication will wreak havoc on the oyster industry through testing of Vibrio in the waters. Mitch Jurisich stated that the paper did not target oyster specifically but will predict where Vibrio will be found in water bodies. Mitch Jurisich stated the negative effects this kind of publication could have on tourism of multiple states along the gulf coast.

Steve Pollock stated that NASA funded 1.5 million dollars towards the research. Steve Pollock stated that the researchers were doing what they were paid to do. Therefore, it's not the researchers who are at fault by this publication from LSU.

Al Sunseri stated that he agrees with Steve Pollock and that LSU has become loose on what they publicize. Al Sunseri stated that publications like this one jeopardize various industry in Louisiana. Al Sunseri stated that there should be more review before press releases are published so people understand the ramifications of it.

Jakov Jurisic stated how this publication could have impacts on sports fishing.

Mitch Jurisich stated that sports fishing is included in tourism

Jakov Jurisic stated how someone contracted Vibrio from a scratch while washing their boat and later died from it.

Mitch Jurisich stated that the article should not have been published as it was and should have went through more rigorous vetting before its release.

Jakov Jurisic asked if the taskforce could send a certified letter requesting LSU's presence at the next meeting.

Sam Slavich suggested reaching out to LSU to talk about the article instead of requiring them to be at the meeting.

Mitch Jurisich stated that the authors of the paper were contacted but they could not make the meeting.

Al Sunseri stated that the authors of the paper had no idea LSU was using their paper in a press release.

Steve Pollock stated that he assumed the authors were unaware of its release.

Al Sunseri stated there needs to be a more rigorous review process and the committee needs to talk with the person who put out the press release.

Sam Slavich stated that contacting the people who made the press release would be the next best course of action.

Steve Pollock stated the authors of the paper have nothing to gain from the press release. Steve Pollock stated that LSU publication is responsible for the publication and that is who the committee should be contacting.

Al Sunseri stated he did not understand the purpose of the paper because the paper is stating things that were already known for decades. Al Sunseri stated when water temperature hits 70 degrees Vibrio increases and where there are spots of 90 degrees the Vibrio will be higher in those areas. Al Sunseri stated that the virulence of the Vibrio in these areas is impossible to tell. Al Sunseri stated this research is not an indicator that people will get infected with Vibrio by swimming, fishing, or consuming seafood. Al Sunseri stated that virulence detection would be worthy of research, but the paper does not provide that information. Al Sunseri stated that the press release makes it sound as if the research presented in the article can detect virulence and predict when people will become sick.

Mitch Jurisich asked if healthy people or just immunocompromised people contract Vibrio.

Jennifer Armentor stated that anyone can contract Vibrio, but immunocompromised people are more at risk. Jennifer Armentor stated the authors of the paper previously contacted LDH and ask if LDH wanted to use their database to predict Vibrio concentrations, but the LDH rejected it.

Jakov Jurisic asked if the research was trying to predict what's going to happen this upcoming summer.

Steve Pollock stated he talked to Dr. Deng and the model was unable to predict previous outbreaks of vibrio. Steve Pollock stated they did have successful predictions of a Norovirus outbreak in Area 3 in early 2025. Steve Pollock stated that if area 3 had been closed it would have saved money for industry. Steve Pollock stated that the research can predict vibrio concentrations but is unable to determine if they are infectious. Steve Pollock stated the FDA has no limit of Vibrio concentrations that would cause a shutdown of an area. Steve Pollock stated there is no data on chance of virulence based on vibrio concentrations and the researchers would need more funding to find that out.

Jakov Jurisic stated there was an extremely wet summer last year. Jakov Jurisic asked if that would contribute to higher Vibrio numbers.

Jennifer Armentor stated that rain water and salinity have an effect, but they did not think the study was a good predictor of Vibrio. Jennifer Armentor stated the LDH does not test the waters for vibrio.

Steve Pollock stated fecal concentrations could be low but there still could be high numbers of Vibrio. Steve Pollock stated the study claimed that it could predict 80 days before an outbreak of Vibrio based on solar radiation.

Mitch Jurisich stated that the researchers produced results based more on the funding they received and not on an intent to hurt the oyster industry.

Steve Pollock stated that the article published by LSU took a wrong spin on the paper and published biased results. Steve Pollock stated the people responsible for the press release should be held accountable. Steve Pollock suggested getting in contact with the publishing office through Sea Grant.

Steve Pollock motioned to discuss with the publication department at LSU the potential consequence of such publications 2nd by Jakov Jurisic. Motion carried.

VII. Public Comment

Steve Pollock motioned to discuss resending a Letter to the Grand Isle Port Commission and the Jefferson Parish Council regarding the certification of the Planned Oyster Facility in Grand Isle 2nd by Sam Slavich. Motion failed.

Dr. John Dale "Zach" Lea announced the opening of a new section of the Montegut Oyster Park and wanted to thank the landowners who have taken the uncommon and forward-looking step of allowing their property to be subleased to pioneering off-bottom oyster farmers.

Jakov Jurisic asked Dr. John Dale "Zach" Lea if any of the items were related to the agenda.

Dr. John Dale "Zach" Lea stated it was not related to today's agenda.

Jakov Jurisic asked why he was advertising his business when it was not an agenda item.

Dr. John Dale "Zach" Lea stated it was public comment.

Jakov Jurisic stated he agreed but it was not related to what they discussed.

Dr. John Dale "Zach" Lea asked if he could make a public comment at any meeting.

Mitch Jurisich stated that public comment should adhere to the agenda.

Brad Robin Stated Dr. John Dale "Zach" Lea is not promoting the oyster industry as a whole and is only promoting his personal operations.

Mitch Jurisich stated that he will allow Dr. John Dale "Zach" Lea to finish his public comment.

Dr. John Dale "Zach" Lea stated that he is a part of the off bottom industry and his objective is to promote that industry. Dr. John Dale "Zach" Lea stated he is thankful for the people involved including Don Jude Giroir, Penny Melançon Daigneault, Colette Melancon, Chad Michael Thibodaux, Matthew Blanchard, and Donna Bonvillian White who are all descendants and current stewards of the land owned by the Guidry family. Dr. John Dale "Zach" Lea stated he wanted to thank DENR, LDWF, and LDH for working with me to secure the necessary permits. Dr. John Dale "Zach" Lea stated he appreciates Jennifer Armentor of LDH for her patience and assistance and stated his application to Brandon Hebert, Andy DePaola, and other Louisiana oyster producers for their support and guidance.

Dr. John Dale "Zach" Lea stated he would like to offer his experience and services to the coastal community, and especially to the oyster industry. Dr. John Dale "Zach" Lea stated that he encourages all owners of unused water-bottom property and LDWF oyster leases located in clean, suitable water to consider converting their unused areas into off-bottom oyster farms. Dr. John Dale "Zach" Lea stated he can assist with permit applications, including operational plans and vicinity maps and can also provide oyster-garden and oyster-farm gear, along with seed oysters. Dr. John Dale "Zach" Lea stated the simplest starter setup is a grow-out mesh bag suspended between two bamboo poles and containing 200 one-inch oysters. Dr. John Dale "Zach" Lea stated he can supply the complete kit, including seed. Introductory pricing is as follows: one-inch seed 10¢ each, two-inch seed 20¢ each, and 2.5-inch seed at 25¢ each.

Dr. Earl Melancon stated Dr. John Dale “Zach” Lea is using the term seed incorrectly as seed should only be consider under one inch. Dr. Earl Melancon asked him not to use the word seed when promoting AOC oysters. Dr. Earl Melancon stated the proper term would be a grow-out oyster.

Dr. John Dale “Zach” Lea stated LDWF defines seed as anything under 3 inches.

Dr. Earl Melancon stated according to LDH law seed is anything under one inch and it creates confusion and is inappropriate to call an oyster over one inch seed.

VIII. The next Oyster Task Force meeting is set for Tuesday, February 24, 2026 for 10:00am at the New Orleans Lakefront Airport. A Research Committee will be held prior to the full OTF meeting beginning for 9:00am.

IX. Brad Robin motioned to adjourn the meeting, 2nd by Brandt Lafrance. Motion Carries.