

**Shrimp Task Force Meeting Minutes**  
**May 6, 2026, 1:00pm**  
**LDWF Headquarters**  
**2000 Quail Drive Baton Rouge, LA 70808**

**I. Pledge of Allegiance**

**II. Call to Order**

**III. Roll Call**

**Voting Members Present:**

Rodney Olander  
Andrew Blanchard  
Acy Cooper, Jr.  
Lance Nacio  
Kristen Baumer

**Voting Members Absent:**

Alan Gibson  
Randy Pearce  
Jeff Drury  
Phillip Tran  
Chalin Delaune

**Non-Voting Members Present:**

Konnor Lockfield  
Capt. Joey Thompson in for Davis Madere  
Gene Cavalier  
Jack Issacs

**Non-Voting Members Absent:**

Bryan Wallace

**IV.** Rodney Olander motioned to approve the February 25, 2026 meeting minutes, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Acy Cooper, Jr. Motion carries.

**V.** Rodney Olander motioned to approve the May 6, 2026 meeting agenda, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Acy Cooper, Jr. Motion carries.

**VI. Federal Shrimp Permit Report**

Acy Cooper, Jr. stated that the printed federal permit list was too small to read and requested a larger version for the next meeting. The Chair encouraged members and fishermen to contact any fishermen who may be in default on their federal permits.

**VII. Financial Report**

Key figures reported:

- Remaining FY balance: \$438,332
- FY 2026 budget: \$220,000
- Remaining FY 2026 balance: \$28,880

Acy Cooper, Jr. requested a detailed breakdown of payments made to SeaD Consulting, including the total amount paid to date.

Andrew Blanchard stated that SeaD had reported receiving approximately \$200,000, though this figure did not come from an LDWF audit.

Acy Cooper, Jr. stated his understanding that SEAD had been paid two to three times in amounts near \$70,000 each.

Konner Lockfield explained that the \$106,500 listed under professional services reflected multiple SeaD payments, including outstanding or cumulative amounts.

Acy Cooper, Jr. motioned to accept the financial report, 2nd by Lance Nacio. Motion passed without opposition.

## **VIII. New Business**

### **A. To Receive a Report on the Special Shrimp Season Opening in the Vermillion-Teche Basin - LDWF**

Konner Lockfield reported that the special opening in the Vermilion–Teche Basin was based solely on white-shrimp biological data, as the basin does not support a brown-shrimp fishery. He stated that shrimp had reached marketable size in high abundance and that the opening functioned as an extension of the fall white-shrimp season rather than an early spring opening. He explained that LDWF collected biological data in late March and again on April 13–14 before issuing the required 72-hour public notice.

Acy Cooper, Jr. stated that the primary concern was the lack of early communication to the public and the industry. He explained that many fishermen were unable to prepare within 72 hours, particularly those traveling long distances, and that the short notice resulted in significant public criticism. He stated that earlier informal notice to the Task Force and Commission would have allowed the industry to prepare.

Rodney Olander stated that early opening discussions occurred at the February meeting and that he received a call about a week prior indicating shrimp were marketable, though confirmation did not come until the official notice. He stated that LDWF made the correct biological decision but acknowledged public frustration.

Patrick Banks acknowledged the communication gaps and stated that greater outreach would be pursued in the future. He stated that LDWF reached out to the industry in Zone 2 but the department was unaware that some of the fishermen in other areas would fish in Zone 2.

Ryan Montegut stated that the decision was made based on biological data and it was not intentional and the department looked at it as a way for fishermen to make money.

Lance Nacio stated that fishermen in Zone 2 were frustrated because brown shrimp were leaving the area and questioned why openings were not aligned across basins.

Rodney Olander stated that when he spoke with Konner Lockfield the crossover dates were not matching and the entire state could not open on the same date.

Konner Lockfield explained that crossover dates shift weekly and that the April 24 opening reflected the best available biological data at the time.

Acy Cooper, Jr. stated that the community would have preferred both basins to open together to avoid price drops and economic hardship.

Patrick Banks explained that opening 5 days earlier was a possibility but it would be an early opening to the spring season which was technically and legally different than what was done in Vermillion. He stated that in order to open other areas earlier would require action from the commission and asked the task force to keep this in mind for next year if they prefer to open areas based on brown shrimp data.

Kristen Baumer stated that LDWF acted appropriately based on biological data and emphasized that neither LDWF nor Task Force members should withhold information.

Konner Lockfield stated that it would be beneficial if the task force meets in early April to discuss the possibility of early openings in the spring and see what the data looks like in the winter.

Acy Cooper, Jr. agreed and stated that transparency was essential to avoid perceptions of preferential treatment.

Rodney Olander noted that this is a pilot program and that communication improvements will continue.

Andrew Blanchard stated that many fishermen benefited from the opening and that communication issues can be corrected moving forward.

## **B. To Hear and Consider Shrimp Data Trends and the 2026 Inshore Spring Shrimp Season Recommendations – LDWF**

Konner Lockfield presented shrimp data trends and environmental conditions used to determine the recommended opening date for the 2026 spring shrimp season. He reviewed ten-year landings data, noting that 2025 landings were stronger than recent years but still below long-term averages. May 2025 landings were above average, while June through August were below average. Price per pound improved across most count sizes. He also noted continued declines in license sales and fishing effort.

Konner Lockfield reviewed environmental conditions for 2025–2026, stating that rainfall and Mississippi River discharge were well below average, while water temperatures were slightly above average and salinity levels were higher than long-term means. These conditions favored early brown-shrimp growth. Based on current sampling, projected crossover dates were May 10 for Zone 1, May 13 for Zone 2, and May 15 for Zone 3. He recommended a coordinated statewide opening on May 13 at 6:00 AM, noting that Zone 3 was already near crossover and that the adjustment would have minimal biological impact.

Konner Lockfield concluded the biological and environmental overview and the floor was opened for public questions.

Barry Rodgers, a fisherman from Terrebonne Parish, asked whether Vermilion Bay would remain open or closed after May 13, given the proposed statewide opening date.

Konner Lockfield clarified that Vermilion Bay had been opened earlier under a special emergency declaration for the white shrimp fall season, which began on April 24. He explained that this special season was scheduled to close on May 10, and because the white shrimp in that basin had already crossed over well beyond the 50-count threshold, there were no biological concerns with reopening Vermilion Bay as part of the statewide spring opening. Therefore, if the Commission adopted LDWF's recommendation, Vermilion Bay would open on May 13 along with the rest of the state.

Another fisherman, James Blanchard, also from Terrebonne Parish, asked whether the special white-shrimp opening would affect the legally required number of days for the spring season.

Konner Lockfield clarified that the minimum-days requirement no longer exists, as that law had been removed. He confirmed that the special white-shrimp opening would not reduce or interfere with the spring season, and that the statewide opening on May 13 would proceed normal. He stated that the commission would meet the following day and asking whether the task force wished to provide a formal recommendation.

Lance Nacio made a motion was to support LDWF's recommendation for a statewide May 13 opening at 6:00 AM. Lance Nacio motioned to accept LDWF's recommendation to open on May 13, motion 2<sup>nd</sup> by Kristen Baumer. Motion carries.

Andrew Blanchard stated he would present this recommendation to the commission at the following day's meeting.

### **C. To Discuss Existing and Proposed Legislation through the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) Related to the Shrimp Industry – LDH**

Greg Richard of the Louisiana Department of Health provided an update on enforcement of menu-labeling requirements for imported seafood. He explained that LDH's sanitarians already inspect food sources during routine health inspections, so verifying shrimp and crawfish origin fits naturally into their existing workflow. He stated that during routine inspections storage areas, boxes, and invoices are evaluated. Imported product must be clearly disclosed on menus or posted signage. Violations were reclassified as critical, and monetary penalties now apply: \$500 for a first violation, \$1,000 for a second, and \$2,000 for subsequent violations. LDH has issued approximately \$230,000 in fines since January, with about \$140,000 collected to date. He stated that violations have decreased significantly due to the deterrent effect of fines.

Greg Richard confirmed that fine revenue is deposited into LDH's general operating fund.

Acy Cooper, Jr. questioned whether this use aligned with legislative intent and stated he would review the matter.

Gene Cavalier noted that House Bill 349, currently on the Senate floor, addresses potential uses of fine revenue. Richard stated that LDH will begin internal quality-assurance audits to ensure inspectors are marking violations consistently.

Discussion followed regarding commingling of local and imported product.

Greg Richard stated that LDH does not conduct genetic testing and relies on documentation and labeling. He noted that imported product must be disclosed even if local product is also used.

Acy Cooper, Jr. stated that the public frequently asks for SeaD testing results and that the Task Force needs to determine whether those results can be shared.

Kristen Baumer stated that collaboration between SeaD and LDH could help identify establishments with labeling issues.

Greg Richard stated that comparing SeaD results with LDH inspection records could help evaluate the effectiveness of the testing program.

Andrew Blanchard reported that SeaD is working toward formal accreditation for its testing methods and that accreditation would allow SeaD to present a proposal for incorporating genetic testing into enforcement. He also referenced federal and state initiatives aimed at supporting the domestic shrimp industry.

Greg Richard stated that LDH expects to have results from its internal audits by the next meeting and reiterated that the ability to issue fines at the time of inspection has strengthened enforcement. He further explained that the fine structure is not based on multiple violations found during a single inspection but rather on the number of separate violations issued over time. Each new violation increases the fine amount until it reaches the maximum of \$2,000, after which all subsequent violations remain at that level. He stated that this escalating structure, combined with LDH's policy of withholding permit renewals until all fines are paid, has proven to be a strong deterrent for non-compliance.

Acy Cooper, Jr. requested LDH's contact information for reporting suspected violations, and Richard stated that he would provide the necessary details. He confirmed that LDH can dispatch inspectors in response to specific complaints and that, when a complaint concerns imported-seafood disclosure, inspectors will focus on that issue unless the establishment is also due for a routine inspection. He reiterated LDH's commitment to enforcing the law and noted that the Task Force had granted LDH the authority to issue fines, which the department intends to uphold.

Andrew Blanchard asked whether LDH conducts genetic testing to verify shrimp origin or relies solely on packaging and documentation.

Greg Richard confirmed that LDH does not perform genetic testing and instead uses invoices, labels, and other documentation, consistent with LDH's procedures for other regulated food products.

Andrew Blanchard expressed concern about the possibility of commingling local and imported shrimp at the restaurant level.

Greg Richard acknowledged the concern but stated that LDH relies on documentation and labeling requirements to enforce compliance. He emphasized that any imported product present on-site must be properly disclosed, even if the restaurant also uses local product, and noted that the fine structure has encouraged restaurants to be more transparent.

Acy Cooper, Jr. stated that LDH has collected approximately \$180,000 in fines so far, with the remaining balance expected during permit renewals.

Greg Richard confirmed this and added that the only circumstance in which a restaurant may avoid a fine is when it is able to correct signage or menu disclosures immediately while inspectors are present. Otherwise, the restaurant will receive a fine and a scheduled follow-up inspection. He noted that after an initial warning, if a follow-up inspection finds the issue unresolved, the fine may automatically escalate to \$1,000.

Kristen Baumer asked whether the fines were causing restaurants to serve less local shrimp or less shrimp overall.

Greg Richard stated that he did not believe shrimp sales had declined and explained that, in the past, restaurants sometimes received imported shrimp even when they ordered local. He stated that restaurant owners now appear more conscious of the products they are receiving and are making greater efforts to ensure they are purchasing local shrimp, resulting in more local product being sold.

Lance Nacio asked how long after a violation LDH conducts a re-inspection.

Greg Richard stated that if a restaurant must reprint menus, it is given 60 days before the follow-up inspection to allow time for the reprint. However, if the violation is a second offense and the restaurant has been issued a \$1,000 fine, the re-inspection occurs three days later.

Lance Nacio asked whether LDH seizes the product in violation.

Greg Richard stated that LDH does not seize product.

Lance Nacio then asked whether the restaurant may continue serving the product until the follow-up inspection, and Greg Richard confirmed that it may.

Andrew Blanchard asked whether, in LDH's opinion, the Task Force should continue conducting independent testing or whether LDH's current enforcement and inspection activities were sufficient to maintain compliance.

Greg Richard responded that LDH continues to perform its required inspections, including checking for imported crawfish and shrimp, reviewing storage areas, and verifying whether both local and imported products are present. He stated that genetic testing would be the only way to determine commingling, and LDH does not currently perform such testing. He explained that LDH's enforcement relies on physical verification through boxes, labels, and invoices, and that this method would remain essential even if genetic testing were available. He also acknowledged concerns about sampling only a single menu item, noting that a restaurant may use local product for one dish and imported product for another, meaning that testing only one item may not reflect the full range of products being served.

Acy Cooper, Jr. stated that one of the ongoing challenges with the SeaD Consulting testing program is that members of the public frequently ask where the results can be viewed, and the Task Force is unable to provide an answer. He emphasized that public funds were used for the testing, yet the results cannot currently be shared publicly, and he stated that this issue needs to be addressed and placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

Kristen Baumer stated that there should be collaboration between SeaD and LDH so that LDH could use the testing results to help identify imported seafood.

Greg Richard stated that it would be useful for the Task Force to review SeaD's testing results to determine whether the samples identified as "local" align with LDH's inspection records. He explained that this comparison would allow the Task Force to determine whether any of the establishments had previously been cited for violations or whether the testing program helped correct issues before LDH inspections occurred. He stated that comparing the two sets of information could help demonstrate the effectiveness of the testing program.

Kristen Baumer stated that identifying restaurants that mislabeled imported seafood would be beneficial, as it would make it more difficult for establishments that do not follow the law to avoid consequences and would help level the playing field for restaurants that comply.

Greg Richard stated that before fines were implemented, when incorrect or missing identification of imported seafood was only a critical violation, restaurants often knew when inspections would occur and would temporarily switch to local product for that day. He stated that subsequent inspections frequently revealed that imported product had returned. He reiterated that the fine structure has been an effective deterrent for this behavior.

Andrew Blanchard noted that the fine structure implemented on January 1, 2025 has strengthened enforcement efforts. He added that several bills currently moving through the Legislature may further clarify agency roles and improve enforcement efficiency, and he stated that Gene Cavalier would provide an update on these bills later in the meeting. The discussion then turned to SeaD Consulting's genetic-testing program.

Andrew Blanchard reported that SeaD is actively working toward obtaining formal accreditation for its testing methods and previously estimated that accreditation could be achieved within approximately sixty days. Once accredited, SeaD would be able to present a formal proposal to either the Department of Agriculture and Forestry or LDH to incorporate genetic testing into enforcement activities. He stated that such testing could help agencies determine whether commingling of local and imported product is occurring at the restaurant level, which cannot be detected through visual inspection alone.

Andrew Blanchard also referenced the federal administration's recent USDA shrimp initiative, noting that multiple agencies—including the Department of Agriculture and Forestry, LDH, and FDA—are evaluating their roles in implementation. He stated that each agency has expressed interest in participating and that the situation remains fluid as federal guidance develops. He emphasized that Louisiana's Legislature is simultaneously considering state-level measures aimed at protecting and stabilizing the domestic shrimp industry, which is why several bills are currently being advanced.

Andrew Blanchard stated that he hopes the implementation of proposed legislation will encourage restaurants to purchase more local seafood. He expressed appreciation for LDH's ongoing enforcement efforts and stated that the fine system is beginning to correct long-standing issues, noting that such measures should have been implemented decades ago. He emphasized that the progress being made is encouraging.

Greg Richard added that LDH expects to have results from its internal quality-assurance audits by the next meeting. These audits will help determine whether inspectors are marking violations consistently and whether restaurants are increasingly using local product or properly labeling imported product. He

reiterated that the authority to issue fines at the time of inspection is new for LDH and that the department is working to ensure inspectors apply the law uniformly across the state.

Andrew Blanchard then addressed the issue of SeaD's testing data. He stated that SeaD possesses detailed information on which restaurants passed or failed genetic testing and explained that if LDH wished to obtain that information, it would need to submit a request to the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, as LDWF is the contracting agency. He clarified that it would then be up to the Shrimp Task Force or Commission to determine whether the reports could be released.

Patrick Banks stated that it would be helpful to understand the Task Force's position on whether SeaD's testing results should be shared with LDH. He noted that inter-agency sharing of information is standard practice and that SeaD's testing data is currently held under LDWF's contract, funded with Task Force resources. He reminded the Task Force that this issue had been discussed previously and that his understanding was that the Task Force supported sharing the information with LDH if requested. He stated that SeaD and LDWF are prepared to provide the data upon receiving direction from the Task Force.

Acy Cooper, Jr. stated that many members of the public have asked where they can access the testing results, given that public funds were used to conduct the testing.

Patrick Banks clarified that public release of the data is a separate issue from inter-agency sharing and would be addressed under the next agenda item. He confirmed that sharing the data with LDH poses no legal issue, as it would be an exchange between sister agencies.

Acy Cooper, Jr. asked whether SeaD would prefer a formal motion to confirm the Task Force's position on data sharing, and Patrick Banks stated that a motion would be helpful.

Acy Cooper, Jr. made a motion for SeaD to share the testing data with LDH to aid the department in its internal audit of enforcement consistency. He stated that by sharing the data, LDH would be able to compare testing results with fining information and identify which restaurants are in compliance and which are not.

Andrew Blanchard asked Greg Richard whether the genetic-testing information would be useful to LDH.

Greg Richard stated that SeaD's testing results would be a valuable tool for LDH's internal evaluation. He explained that the data may confirm instances where LDH's enforcement efforts resulted in restaurants transitioning to local product, but it may also reveal situations where SEAD identified imported product at locations where LDH did not issue a violation. He stated that this information would help LDH identify any shortcomings in its inspection process and strengthen consistency statewide.

Andrew Blanchard called for a second, Lance Nacio seconded the motion, and the motion passed with no opposition.

Acy Cooper, Jr. stated that once LDH has access to SeaD's testing data, the department should present its findings at the next meeting regarding whether the fines are increasing the use of local product and the overall effectiveness of the testing program.

Lance Nacio then asked LDH for clarification regarding what happens after a labeling violation is identified. He noted that LDH's inspections focus on labeling and disclosure but questioned whether LDH



forwards information to the Department of Agriculture and Forestry for product testing when a violation is found. He expressed concern that consumers may be misled if restaurants fail to disclose imported shrimp, resulting in customers unknowingly being served imported product when they specifically wish to avoid it. He asked what actions are taken on the testing side to address this issue.

Greg Richard responded that when LDH identifies a labeling violation, the department's current procedure is to give the restaurant time to correct the issue and update its menu or signage. He stated that LDH does not refer those cases to the Department of Agriculture and Forestry for product testing at this time.

Lance Nacio expressed concern with that approach, stating that if a restaurant is violating labeling laws, the product should still be tested because the issue extends beyond disclosure and into public safety. He noted that consumers may unknowingly be served imported shrimp containing antibiotics or other contaminants, and that parents do not want their families exposed to such risks.

Greg Richard acknowledged the concern and stated that LDH could discuss the matter further with the Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

Greg Cavalier added that any expansion of testing responsibilities would require additional discussion before moving forward.

Andrew Blanchard noted that before LDH could utilize SeaD's rapid genetic-testing method, SeaD must first complete the process of obtaining formal accreditation recognized by the relevant agencies. He stated that SeaD is currently working toward that accreditation and that the Task Force will need to wait until the process is finalized. He also noted that SeaD was unable to attend the meeting due to a back injury but plans to be present at the next meeting.

With no further questions for Greg Richard, Andrew Blanchard noted that the Task Force had already passed a motion earlier in the meeting with no opposition. He thanked Richard for attending and for providing clarity on LDH's enforcement activities. Richard thanked the Task Force for the opportunity to speak. With no further questions, the Chair prepared to move to the next agenda item.

#### **D. To Discuss Public Records Relating to Shrimp Testing in Restaurants – STF**

Patrick Banks addressed the Task Force regarding the public release of shrimp-testing results conducted by SeaD Consulting. He stated that the Task Force had raised this question several times, and Acy Cooper, Jr. had referenced it earlier in the meeting. He explained that LDWF's legal staff confirmed that SeaD's testing results are public records; however, LDWF may only release them in response to a formal public-records request. He noted that this creates a distinction between the Task Force's desire to release the information proactively and LDWF's legal obligation to release it only upon request. He clarified that if a Task Force member—or any member of the public—submits a public-records request, LDWF can provide the documents, and once released, the requester may share them publicly at their discretion.

Acy Cooper, Jr. asked whether he could obtain the information by submitting a public-records request, and Patrick Banks confirmed that he could. Acy Cooper, Jr. then asked whether any member of the public could do the same, and Patrick Banks affirmed that the records are available to anyone because they were produced using public funds.

Andrew Blanchard asked if there were any additional questions regarding shrimp testing, and hearing none, he moved the meeting to the next agenda item.

#### **E. To Discuss the Federal Assessments of Turtle Populations in the Gulf – STF**

NOAA representatives were not present, and the item was deferred to the next meeting.

#### **F. To Discuss Marketing for the Shrimp Industry through the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF) – STF**

Gene Cavalier provided an update on several pieces of legislation currently moving through the Legislature that relate to seafood safety, enforcement authority, and industry oversight. He stated that multiple House Bills had already passed the House and Senate Committee and were expected to be heard on the Senate floor later in the day, noting that the outlook for passage appeared positive. He explained that House Bill 121 addresses “seize and destroy” authority for seafood found to contain prohibited antibiotics. Under previous law, the Department of Agriculture and Forestry conducted testing and then notified LDH, which carried out the seizure and destruction process. The bill would allow the Department of Agriculture’s Weights and Measures Division to perform the seizure and destruction directly, streamlining the process while maintaining communication with LDH.

Gene Cavalier then discussed House Bill 349, which would expand the allowable uses of the Imported Seafood Safety Fund. He stated that the fund is currently restricted to testing activities, and the bill would authorize the Commissioner to use the fund for marketing efforts supporting the promotion of Louisiana seafood. He noted that the Commissioner has a strong record of promoting Louisiana aquaculture and agriculture, and the bill would provide additional flexibility. He also referenced House Bill 588, which would expand membership on the Seafood Safety Task Force to include representatives from other seafood sectors such as crab, oyster, and finfish. He stated that he had already spoken with finfish industry members earlier in the week regarding their participation.

Gene Cavalier reviewed House Bill 725, which would require retailers to maintain seafood invoices for six months. He explained that while federal regulations already require recordkeeping, this bill would give the Department of Agriculture explicit authority to review those records during enforcement actions. He also mentioned House Bill 857, which adds statutory language addressing commingled seafood labeling requirements, ensuring that inspectors have clear legal authority when evaluating businesses for compliance.

Gene Cavalier provided an update on ongoing testing efforts. He stated that the Department continues to conduct antibiotic testing and recently consulted with FDA regarding tolerance levels. He explained that some imported products tested positive for antibiotics but fell within FDA’s allowable tolerance for imported seafood, even though the tolerance for consumption is zero. He noted that this discrepancy has created confusion and that the Department is seeking further clarification from FDA. He also contacted the newly formed USDA Office of Seafood to inform them of Louisiana’s ongoing efforts and to establish communication moving forward. He stated that the Department continues to conduct routine testing, averaging approximately ten samples per week for shrimp and crawfish, and emphasized that the testing funded by the Task Force is being used exactly as intended. He reiterated that the Department remains committed to supporting the industry.

Gene Cavalier also discussed the Department's quarterly reporting requirements under the Seafood Safety Task Force. He stated that businesses are notified well in advance of reporting deadlines and that fines for non-compliance are substantial, beginning at \$15,000, increasing to \$25,000, and reaching up to \$50,000. He noted that these penalties have resulted in timely reporting and improved accountability across the industry. He emphasized that the Department's goal is not only enforcement but also compliance and education. He stated that the Department works closely with LDH to ensure that businesses understand their obligations and that both agencies remain aligned in their efforts.

Gene Cavalier concluded by noting that House Bill 109, which would have directed a portion of sports-wagering proceeds into the Imported Seafood Safety Fund, was tabled in House Appropriations but may be revisited in the future. He added that the Commissioner frequently funds promotional efforts from his own budget and that additional revenue sources would help support statewide seafood initiatives. He thanked the Task Force for its continued support and reiterated that the Department remains committed to promoting Louisiana seafood and ensuring the integrity of the industry.

Acy Cooper, Jr. stated that the industry has made significant progress since the first legislation passed in 2019 and noted that the Task Force has worked for six years to advance these efforts. He stated that agencies and partners are beginning to connect the necessary pieces and that these developments will eventually make a meaningful difference. He emphasized that the industry continues to lose participants at a rapid rate, as reflected in the data presented earlier in the meeting, and expressed hope that current initiatives will begin to improve conditions before they worsen further. He stated that integrating the shrimp industry into USDA programs has long been a goal and that gaining access to agricultural support programs similar to those available to farmers could provide substantial long-term benefits.

Gene Cavalier encouraged all sectors of the seafood industry to engage with the USDA Office of Seafood, noting that the agency is easy to navigate and offers resources related to business development, marketing strategies, grants, and loan opportunities. He stated that industry members should familiarize themselves with the available programs so they are prepared when federal funding opportunities become available, including those referenced in the farm bill.

Acy Cooper, Jr. stated that promotion and education remain critical components of industry recovery. He emphasized the importance of informing consumers—particularly families purchasing seafood in grocery stores—about the products they are buying. He stated that targeted outreach and education are essential to helping consumers understand the differences between local and imported seafood.

Acy Cooper, Jr. noted that he previously discussed promotional strategies with the Commissioner, including the use of billboards, and stated that the Commissioner has a strong record of effective promotion. He asked LDAF to be prepared to move forward quickly once pending legislation is enacted. He requested that Gene Cavalier work with the Commissioner to develop a promotional proposal and present it at the next meeting so that the Task Force can assist in initiating the effort. He stated that the Task Force is willing to help support and accelerate the promotional campaign and emphasized the importance of being ready to implement the program immediately upon passage of the legislation.

Acy Cooper, Jr. stated that promotional efforts will benefit the entire industry and emphasized the importance of directing resources to the appropriate areas. He reiterated that promotion is a key component of industry recovery.

Gene Cavalier responded by noting that recent consumer behavior during the crawfish season demonstrated strong willingness to purchase local product at higher prices, and he expressed hope that similar momentum could be developed for the shrimp industry.

Acy Cooper, Jr. asked Gene Cavalier to obtain a proposal from the Commissioner and prepare a plan so that promotional efforts can begin promptly once the pending legislation is enacted.

Lance Nacio provided an update regarding the USDA Office of Seafood. He stated that he was in Washington, D.C. the previous month with the Southern Shrimp Alliance and had been invited to participate in a USDA roundtable, though he was unable to attend due to a prior commitment related to the Magnuson anniversary. He explained that USDA has since held a virtual meeting and plans to continue engaging with the industry. He stated that USDA is currently asking the shrimp industry what actions the agency can take to help deregulate and incentivize the fishery. He plans to participate in the next meeting and noted that USDA is seeking recommendations that could provide immediate benefits to the industry.

Acy Cooper, Jr. stated that efforts such as these demonstrate forward progress and are essential to the industry's long-term survival. He expressed concern that improvements may come too slowly but emphasized the importance of continuing to move forward.

Jack Issacs then asked Gene Cavalier when the next Imported Seafood Safety Task Force meeting would be held.

Gene Cavalier stated that he would provide the Task Force with the date of the next Imported Seafood Safety Task Force meeting. He noted that the meeting is scheduled for June, possibly on the 18th, but he would confirm the exact date and forward the information to the Task Force.

Jack Issacs stated that he had attended several of those meetings in the past and found them to be very informative.

Konner Lockfield noted that any future Task Force meeting intended to make a recommendation on the shrimp season would need to be timed appropriately. He asked whether a special Task Force meeting had been held the previous year in addition to the special Commission meeting. He stated they were unsure whether a special Task Force meeting had occurred but confirmed that a Commission meeting is required for any official action so that the public is properly notified. He explained that the Department will close the spring season and the Commission will be responsible for opening the fall season.

Acy Cooper, Jr. suggested that if necessary, a special meeting could be called the day before the Commission meeting. He stated that the Commission typically meets on Wednesdays, while Task Force meetings are generally held on Thursdays.

Konner Lockfield noted that a 24-hour notice is required for Task Force meetings, and a 48-hour notice is required for Commission meetings, meaning the scheduling would need to account for both requirements.

Lance Nacio stated for the record that the spring season the previous May remained open two weeks too long. He explained that vessels fishing in the Upper Terrebonne Estuary were catching predominantly white shrimp during the final two weeks, ranging from 31–35 count to 150 count. He

stated that if the state intends to open the season earlier in the future, it should also consider closing the May season earlier, as the closure the previous year occurred too late.

Gene Cavalier added that he wanted to provide one final update before the meeting concluded. He stated that the Louisiana Farm Bureau has a new member, Matthew Waguespack, who is expected to play an active role in supporting the seafood industry, particularly shrimp and oysters. He noted that Waguespack is scheduled to travel to Washington, D.C. to meet with the USDA Office of Seafood and that he is based in Baton Rouge. He stated that Waguespack represents a new avenue of support for the industry and that the Farm Bureau is becoming increasingly involved. He offered to share his contact information and expressed interest in having him attend a future Task Force meeting.

#### **IX. Public Comment**

#### **X. Set Next Meeting**

The next Shrimp Task Force meeting was set for Wednesday, August 5<sup>th</sup> 2026.

#### **XI. Adjournment**

Rodney Olander motioned to adjourn the meeting, 2<sup>nd</sup> by Lance Nacio. Motion Carries.