

**Finfish Task Force Meeting
Monday, May 4, 2026, 10:00AM
LDWF Headquarters 2000 Quail Drive
Baton Rouge, LA 70898**

I. Pledge of Allegiance

II. Roll Call and Introduction of Guests

Voting Members Present

Stuart Billeaud
Ben Graham
George Huye
Steve Rockwieler
David Alphonso

Voting Members Absent

James Pelas
Wayne Rollo
Daryl Simon
Jay Trotter
Daniel Edgar
Adam Guillory
Senator Bob Hensgens
Kindra W. Arnesen

Non-voting Members Present

Jason Adriance
Lt. Joey Thompson
Jack Isaacs
Gene Cavalier

Non-voting Members Absent

John Walters

III. Approval of the February 26, 2026 Meeting Minutes

Stuart Billeaud moved to approve the February 26, 2026 meeting minutes. George Huye seconded the motion. The motion carried with no opposition.

IV. Approval of the May 4, 2026 Meeting Agenda

Stuart Billeaud moved to amend the agenda to add Agenda Item F. *To Discuss Proposed Shell Offshore Pipeline Project*. David Alphonso seconded the motion. Motion carries.

Stuart Billeaud moved to approve the amended agenda. David Alphonso seconded the motion. Motion carries

George Huye moved to approve the May 4, 2026 meeting agenda. Stuart Billeaud seconded the motion. The motion carried with no opposition.

V. New Business

A. To Discuss the Notice of Intent (NOI) Regarding Charter Fishing on WMAs – FTF

Richard Fisher, CEO of the Louisiana Charter Boat Association, provided background on a Notice of Intent (NOI) regarding charter fishing on Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs). Fisher explained that language added to a hunting-related NOI would prohibit charter captains from possessing fish while on a WMA, rather than simply prohibiting harvest on a WMA. He stated that charter captains supported the Commission's intent to prohibit harvest on WMAs while operating charter trips, but the current wording created unintended consequences by potentially placing charter captains in violation when transporting legally harvested fish through a WMA. Fisher noted that the issue could no longer be amended at the current stage of the NOI process and requested that it be revisited so the language could better reflect the Commission's intent. Task Force members discussed the distinction between possession and harvest, the NOI process, and options available to the Commission for addressing the issue. Patrick Banks confirmed the issue arose during the Commission process and was not originally brought forward by the agency. Members expressed concern that the current language did not accurately reflect the intended outcome.

David Alphonso moved that the Finfish Task Force recommend that the Commission remove the possession ban on charter captains while traversing or being on a WMA. Stuart Billeaud seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously with no opposition.

B. To Discuss the Notice of Intent (NOI) Process and the Role of the Finfish Task Force - FTF

David Alphonso raised questions regarding the role of the Finfish Task Force in the Notice of Intent (NOI) process and how task forces can provide input on regulatory proposals affecting their industries. He expressed concern that the charter fishing issue discussed under the previous agenda item had advanced through the Commission process without prior review by the Finfish Task Force and asked how task forces could be better informed and involved in future discussions.

Jason Adriance explained that the Finfish Task Force serves as an advisory body to the LDWF and Commission and can provide recommendations through motions and other input. Patrick Banks stated that the LDWF's normal practice is to bring issues before task forces whenever possible so members have an opportunity to provide advice and recommendations before matters reach the Commission. He noted that the recent charter fishing issue was an unusual situation that arose during a Commission meeting without advance notice to the LDWF or the task force. Patrick emphasized that the LDWF remains committed to keeping task forces informed of upcoming issues and seeking their input whenever possible.

Task Force members discussed ways to improve communication, including receiving notifications when NOIs are published and increasing communication between task force members and commissioners. Members also discussed the NOI timeline and public comment process, with Department staff and legal counsel providing clarification regarding public comment opportunities, potpourri amendments, and procedural requirements. Richard Fisher noted that in the charter fishing case, the amendment occurred after the public comment period had ended, limiting the available options for addressing the issue within the existing NOI process.

The discussion also addressed the possibility of special meetings and virtual participation when time-sensitive issues arise between regularly scheduled meetings. Legal counsel advised that any special meeting would be subject to public meeting requirements, including public notice and public access. Department staff indicated that virtual meetings had been utilized in the past and agreed to review current requirements and options for future consideration. Members expressed interest in exploring additional opportunities for participation and communication while remaining compliant with public meeting laws. No action was taken.

C. To Discuss Requesting a Presentation/Workshop for Robert's Rules of Order by LA Sea Grant – FTF

David Alphonso discussed the possibility of requesting a presentation or workshop from Louisiana Sea Grant on Robert's Rules of Order to provide Task Force members with a better understanding of meeting procedures. He noted that a workshop format would allow members to ask questions and receive clarification. Members discussed the value of such training and acknowledged that Task Force meetings often operate under a more informal process than strict Robert's Rules of Order. Jack Isaacs commented that while the task force has developed its own meeting style over time, additional training could be beneficial and help improve meeting procedures.

The Task Force agreed that Louisiana Sea Grant should be contacted to determine whether a presentation could be provided at a future meeting or through a separate workshop. Sonya Williams agreed to reach out to Louisiana Sea Grant to discuss available options.

D. To Discuss an Exemption for Red Drum Size Limits During Recreational Fishing Tournaments – FTF

Ben Graham introduced a discussion regarding House Concurrent Resolution 5 (HCR 5) and requested information on the proposal and its status. Representative Joseph Orgeron explained that he was serving as the sponsor of the resolution, which originated from requests by organizers of established fishing rodeos following changes to Louisiana's red drum regulations. He stated that since the adoption of the current redfish regulations, including the elimination of the bull redfish allowance, tournament organizers had continued seeking a way to allow the harvest of bull redfish for rodeo weigh-ins. Representative Orgeron noted that he had previously explored alternative approaches, including a tagging system similar to one used in Texas, but those efforts were not pursued due to concerns raised by both the Department and conservation groups.

Representative Orgeron stated that requests for exemptions continued and that HCR 5 was developed in an effort to place clear restrictions on an existing permit authority. He explained that the resolution would allow permits to be considered on a case-by-case basis and would limit eligibility to established rodeos that previously included a bull redfish category. He further noted that he had hoped to include language requiring harvested fish to be used for biological study, including collection of otoliths, but that provision was not included in the final draft of the resolution. Representative Orgeron also stated that his goal was to limit participation as much as possible and that he hoped only a small number of permits would ultimately be issued.

Members discussed how the permit process would work and the potential number of tournaments that could qualify. Representative Orgeron explained that permits would not be available to new rodeos and that qualifying events would be required to meet specific criteria regarding their history and operation. He stated that any applications would be reviewed according to the criteria established in the resolution. Ben Graham stated that the item was intended as a discussion topic to keep members informed of the proposal as it moved through the legislative process.

E. To Receive and Consider Requested Commercial Catfish Data Related to the 2017 Establishment of USDA Inspection Regulations - LDWF

Patrick Banks presented commercial catfish data requested by the Task Force at a previous meeting regarding the 2017 implementation of USDA catfish inspection regulations. He explained that the information had been requested by Kindra Arnesen and was intended to help evaluate any potential impacts the regulations may have had on catfish processors, the number of dealers participating in the industry, and commercial fishing effort. Patrick noted that the LDWF was providing the requested data for the Task Force's consideration.

Gene Cavalier provided additional information regarding the USDA inspection program, explaining that processors receive inspection coverage during established weekday hours at no cost. He noted that processors may obtain inspection services outside those hours, but additional costs apply. Members briefly discussed the

issue and the information previously provided regarding processing schedules and inspection requirements. Ben Graham requested that the information be shared with Kindra Arnesen and noted that any additional questions or potential action items could be addressed at a future meeting.

F. To Discuss Proposed Shell Offshore Pipeline Project

Josh Kovacic of Shell provided an overview of a proposed offshore crude oil pipeline project currently in the permitting phase. He explained that the project would consist of a 24-inch steel pipeline extending approximately 100 miles from Port Fourchon to Shell's Green Canyon 19 offshore platform. According to Kovacic, the pipeline would primarily follow existing offshore pipeline corridors and would include a horizontal directional drill beneath the beach near Port Fourchon before extending offshore. Construction is anticipated to begin in mid-2027, with completion projected by the end of 2028. Kovacic stated that Shell is meeting with fisheries stakeholders and other interested parties during the permitting process to identify and address potential conflicts with fishing activity and vessel traffic.

Task Force members asked questions regarding the project route, construction methods, seafloor mapping, and the availability of route maps following construction. Kovacic stated that seafloor surveys had been completed along the proposed route and that the pipeline would generally follow existing corridors. He also indicated that mapping information would likely be publicly available once the project is completed. Kovacic further noted that Shell is coordinating with Port Fourchon to minimize conflicts with marine traffic during construction.

During public comment, Representative Joseph Orgeron commented on the proposed project and stated that the pipeline would be constructed alongside an existing pipeline corridor. He commended Shell for its stakeholder outreach efforts and for engaging with affected interests throughout the permitting process.

VI. Public Comment

Representative Orgeron also referenced the earlier discussion regarding the Notice of Intent process and suggested that task forces could play a greater role by urging the legislature to convene oversight committee meetings when concerns arise regarding proposed regulations or last-minute amendments. He stated that recommendations from task forces could provide valuable input to the legislative oversight process and serve as an additional tool for addressing stakeholder concerns.

Gene Cavalier provided several updates relevant to the seafood industry. He informed members about the USDA's newly established Office of Seafood and noted that Matt Wagenspack, who is working through the Louisiana Farm Bureau office in Baton Rouge, has been assisting with shrimp and oyster industry issues and helping strengthen communication with USDA. Cavalier stated that information regarding the new office had previously been distributed to task force members and noted that the office provides resources and guidance for the seafood industry.

Cavalier also noted that the Louisiana Department of Justice offers free training opportunities related to public meetings and Robert's Rules of Order, which could be useful to task force members interested in additional training on meeting procedures.

Additionally, Cavalier provided an update on House Bill 588 by Representative Domangue, which would expand membership on the Louisiana Seafood Safety Task Force to include additional seafood sectors, including finfish, crab, and oyster representatives. He noted that the legislation was progressing through the legislative process and stated that the additional representation would provide those industries with a voice on seafood safety matters.

Ty Hibbs, a charter fishing guide from the Lake Pontchartrain area, stated that he attended the meeting to voice his opposition to HCR 5. He said he has supported Representative Orgeron on some issues and opposed him on others, but would continue to oppose proposals that he believes conflict with efforts to rebuild Louisiana's redfish population. Hibbs noted that the Department and Commission have taken actions in recent years to

reduce harvest and rebuild the stock and questioned why exemptions would be considered for tournament harvest while recovery efforts remain ongoing.

Hibbs expressed concern that approving exemptions for certain fishing rodeos could encourage similar requests in the future, even with restrictions in place. He also stated that he was disappointed the resolution did not require harvested fish to be used for scientific purposes, noting that scientific use was described only as an intended use rather than a requirement. Hibbs further commented that allowing bull redfish harvest for tournament purposes would send the wrong message at a time when significant effort is being devoted to rebuilding the fishery. He concluded by stating that he had additional ideas regarding redfish conservation and management that he hoped to discuss with the LDWF in the future.

VII. To Hear Future Agenda Item Proposals

A. To Discuss the Notice of Intent (NOI) Regarding Charter Fishing on WMAs – FTF

(Revisit to see what happens after recommendation to the committee)

B. Follow up on Louisiana Department of Justice Robert's Rules of Order training opportunities.

VIII. Set Next Meeting Date and Location

The next meeting of the Finfish Task Force was scheduled for August 5, 2026, at 10:00 a.m. at LDWF Headquarters.

IX. Adjourn

Stuart Billeaud moved to adjourn the meeting. George Huye seconded the motion. The motion carried with no opposition.