

Audubon Nature Institute



G.U.L.F.

—Gulf United for Lasting Fisheries—

Alabama Shrimp Summary Action Plan

Updated September 2021

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Photo credit: Gulf Coast Seafood

INTRODUCTION

The Alabama shrimp fishery improvement project (FIP) is run by Gulf United for Lasting Fisheries (G.U.L.F.), the sustainable seafood program of Audubon Nature Institute. In 2013, under the Oil Disaster Recovery Program (ODRP), the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission requested G.U.L.F. to create sustainability projects across the Gulf of Mexico. G.U.L.F. developed the G.U.L.F. Sustainability Benchmarking Report (SBR) based on the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF) and gathered comprehensive information through interviews with management and industry representatives, public documents, and research publications to assess the fishery against this standard. G.U.L.F. then adapted the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)-based fishery improvement project (FIP) model to create marine advancement plans (MAPs) based on the CCRF assessments, including the Alabama shrimp MAP.

The concept of 'basic' FIPs, (FIPs without an MSC pre-assessment and/or FIPs that do not target an unconditional pass of the MSC standard) grew in recognition in the years that followed the creation of G.U.L.F.'s MAPs. In June 2016, G.U.L.F. took over the Louisiana and Texas shrimp FIPs previously led by the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership (SFP) and converted the Mississippi and Alabama shrimp MAPs to basic FIPs according to the Conservation Alliance for Seafood Solutions' *Guidelines for Supporting Fishery Improvement Projects*.

Scope

- Species:
 - White shrimp (*Litopenaeus setiferus*)
 - Brown shrimp (*Farfantepenaeus aztecus*)
- Location
 - Alabama state territorial waters (three nautical miles)
 - U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ, 3-200 nm)
- Gear
 - Otter Trawl
 - Skimmer Trawl
- Management



- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
- Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC)
- Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR)

Current Participants

[Bon Secour Fisheries](#) - Bon Secour, AL

[Dominick's Seafood](#) - Bayou LaBatre, AL

Status of the Fishery

The Alabama shrimp fishery primarily harvests brown (*Farfantepenaeus aztecus*) and white shrimp (*Litopenaeus setiferus*) in Alabama state territorial waters and federal waters in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. Total brown and white shrimp harvest landed in Alabama in 2016 was 21 million pounds with a dockside value of \$55 million. Harvest of brown shrimp peaks in the summer (spring season: mid-May to July), and harvest of white shrimp peaks in the fall (fall season: mid-August to December). Brown and white shrimp stocks are found in both state and federal waters in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico and are assessed regionally. Stock assessments conducted by NOAA Fisheries Galveston Lab indicate that neither shrimp species is overfished or experiencing overfishing. The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC) and NOAA Fisheries manage the fishery in federal waters and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (ADCNR) manages the fishery within state waters.

The primary gear types used in the Alabama fishery are otter trawls and skimmer trawls. Butterfly nets and cast nets are also legal gear in Alabama and sometimes used but landings from these gear types is minimal. The primary gear offshore is otter trawl and both otter trawl and skimmer trawl gears are used inshore.

Turtle excluder devices (TEDs) are required in otter trawls in both state and federal waters by federal regulation and this regulation is enforced by NOAA, U.S. Coast Guard (USCG), and MDMR. Skimmer trawls are exempt from TED requirements, but must adhere to tow time limits (55 minutes from April 1 - October 31, 75 minutes from November 1 - March 31).

All shrimp trawls in federal waters are required to use certified bycatch reduction devices (BRDs).



BRDs are not required in Alabama state waters; however, some fishermen in state waters do pull BRDs voluntarily. The rate of voluntary BRD use in Alabama state waters is not generally known.

Notable improvements made in the shrimp fishery in recent years include stock monitoring, bycatch reduction, area closures, and sea turtle nesting enhancement projects.

G.U.L.F. completed a Sustainability Benchmarking Report in September 2015 to assess the current status of the Alabama shrimp fishery and identify areas of potential improvement. Initial sustainability gaps identified include the following:

- Bycatch ratios are still high in comparison to other US trawl fisheries;
- Observer coverage is low (1-2% on otter trawl fleet and <1% on skimmer trawl fleet);
- Recent research suggests that compliance with tow time regulations is low and Kemp's ridley turtle captures in skimmers have been documented;
- TED compliance rate has fluctuated close to the required levels in past years, but currently remains above minimum threshold
- Bycatch data and use of BRDs in state waters is limited
- Alabama does not have an industry task force for shrimp; and
- The state Fishery Management Plan is outdated.

Work Plan

ACTION 1	Gear tuning
Reference:	G.U.L.F. SBR 7.2.2 (d), 7.2.2 (g)(iii), 7.6.9 (a)(i,ii,iii), 8.5.1 (a), 12.10(c) MSC Principle 2 - bycatch; endangered, threatened, and protected species; ecosystem
Compliance with TED and BRD regulations requires ongoing maintenance. Participants agree to continue to work with harvesters and docks to ensure that gear is properly tuned through regular courtesy checks (at least annually) by Audubon G.U.L.F., Texas Sea Grant, and/or NOAA Gear Monitoring Team.	

2019 Gear Evaluations							
	Date	# of TEDs	FC*	Minor NC**	Major NC**	NC** Fixed?	Add'l Advice?
1	1/2/19	4	4				
2	1/2/19	4	4				Y
3	1/2/19	4	4				Y
4	1/2/19	4	4				
5	1/3/19	4	4				
6	1/3/19	4	4				
7	8/7/19	2			2		
8	8/7/19	1	1				
9	8/7/19	4	4				
10	10/17/19	4	4				
11	10/17/19	1		1		Y	
12	10/17/19	4	4				

2018 Gear Evaluations							
	Date	# of TEDs	FC*	Minor NC**	Major NC**	NC** Fixed?+	Add'l Advice?
1	6/15/18	4	4				
2	6/15/18	3	2	1			
3	6/15/18	4	4				
4	6/15/18	4	3	1			
5	6/15/18	4	4				
6	6/15/18	4	4				
7	6/14/18	4	1	3		Y	
8	4/6/18	4	4				

+ = Some gear adjustments require more time than is available during site visits. Participants acknowledge any issues and are committed to resolving them.

*FC = Full compliance

**NC = Non-compliance

ACTION 2	Tow the Time Campaign
Reference:	G.U.L.F. SBR 7.2.2 (d), 7.2.2 (g)(iii), 7.6.9 (a)(i,ii,iii), 8.5.1 (a), 12.10(c) MSC Principle 2 - bycatch; endangered, threatened, and protected species; ecosystem



G.U.L.F. and Louisiana Sea Grant developed outreach materials to increase awareness and compliance with current tow time regulations for skimmer trawls. Participants agree to work with skimmer vessel captains to ensure that tow times are strictly adhered to unless skimmer nets have TEDs installed. Information about Tow the Time Campaign can be found at <http://www.laseagrant.org/outreach/projects/tow-the-time/>.

Public comment period for a proposed rule requiring TEDs in skimmer, butterfly, and pusher-head trawls closed on February 14, 2017. The rule was finalized in December 2019, requiring TEDs in skimmer trawl vessels 40' and over. It also updated the definition of tow times (which remain an alternative to TEDs in vessels under 40') to require the net be emptied within the tow time limit, though the frame can remain in the water. G.U.L.F. will work with stakeholders to assess the need for TED and tow time outreach and voluntary TED checks to complement management agency actions.



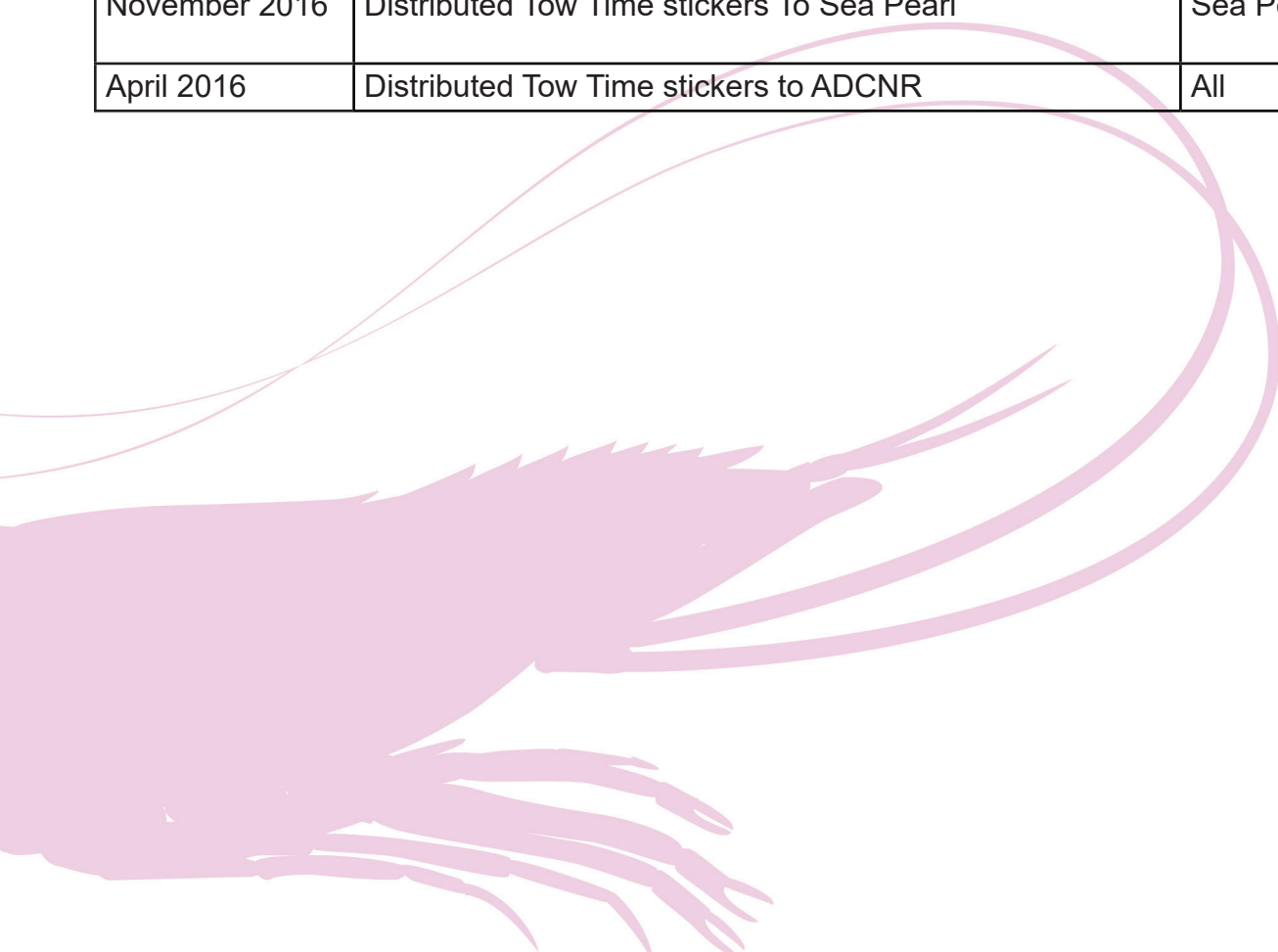
ACTION 3	Collect Bycatch Information
Reference:	<p>G.U.L.F. SBR 7.2.2 (d), 7.2.2 (g)(iii), 7.6.9 (a)(i,ii,iii), 8.5.1 (a), 12.10(c)</p> <p>MSC Principle 2 - bycatch; endangered, threatened, and protected species; ecosystem</p>
<p>G.U.L.F. has developed a survey for shrimp fishermen to fill out in order to capture more information about bycatch in the shrimp fishery and voluntary use of bycatch reduction devices. Participants agree to distribute surveys to fishermen or boat owners they source from when appropriate. G.U.L.F. will keep the identity of those who take the survey anonymous.</p>	

PROGRESS (UPDATED 2.27.2019)

Date	Action	Participants
July 2021	<p>The official pre-assessment for Mississippi and Alabama is underway, with a draft under review and revision. The completed pre-assessment is expected before the end of 2021 and will dictate future FIP activities.</p> <p>FIP participants are supporting the implementation of the Roundtable-initiated project to fully characterize bycatch in the federal shrimp fishery. This project is led by LGL Ecological Research Associates and will collect and transport bycatch that is not characterized by observers on the vessel to conduct full characterization after the vessel returns to port. Though AL FIP participants are not Roundtable members, participants have supported the project by contributing bycatch from their vessels that have been selected for observers during 2021. The project is currently underway with full results expected in 2022.</p>	All
December 2020	<p>Gear checks in the Gulf region have largely been on hold, due to safety concerns during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>In the meantime, the FIP is exploring the potential to transition to a comprehensive FIP. An official MSC pre-assessment is in the works for Mississippi and Alabama. After its completion, stakeholders will meet to determine the path forward.</p>	All
December 2019	NOAA published a final rule on TEDs in skimmer trawls in the Federal Register on December 20, 2019. The final rule requires the use of TEDs on skimmer vessels 40' and over. A final environment impact statement on the TED rule was also published in December 2020 and can be found on the NOAA website. Tow time requirements remain an alternative to TEDs in skimmer vessels under 40'. However, the final rule updates the tow time definition requiring the bag be emptied within the tow time limit. The final rule goes into effect in April 2021. G.U.L.F. will consult with stakeholders and determine needs in terms of additional outreach and TED checks.	G.U.L.F.
December 2019	Conducted gear checks on twelve vessels (GULF, NOAA GMT)	Bon Secour Fisheries, Dominick's Seafood



December 2018	Dominick's Seafood joined FIP	Dominick's Seafood
October 2018	Bon Secour Fisheries joined FIP	Bon Secour Fisheries
July 2018	G.U.L.F. participated in a meeting to develop solutions to certification challenges regarding federal bycatch data	G.U.L.F.
April to June 2018	Conducted gear checks on eight vessels (G.U.L.F.)	Dominick's Seafood
January 2017	Public Comment meeting for proposed rule requiring TEDs in skimmer trawls.	All
December 2016	NOAA published a Draft EIS and proposed rule to eliminate tow times and require TEDs in skimmers, butterfly, and wing nets. MAP Committee members will continue to encourage tow time compliance until new rule is finalized.	All
November 2016	Distributed Tow Time stickers To Sea Pearl	Sea Pearl
April 2016	Distributed Tow Time stickers to ADCNR	All



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