

APPROVED BY:

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

**Commission Business Meeting
GSMFC 74th Annual Meeting
Thursday, October 19, 2023**

Call to Order

1st Vice Chair Jason Froeba called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. The following Commissioners and/or Proxies were present:

Jason Froeba, **1st Vice Chair**, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA (*Proxy for Rob Shadoin*)
Doug Boyd, *Citizen Representative from Texas*, Boerne, TX
Christopher Mace, TPWD, Corpus Christi, TX (*Proxy for David Yoskowitz*)
Chris Nelson, *Citizen Representative from Alabama*, Bon Secour Fisheries, Bon Secour, AL
John Mareska, ADCNR/MRD, Gulf Shores, AL (*Proxy for Chris Blankenship*)
John Roussel, *Citizen Representative from Louisiana*, Zachary, LA
Patrick Banks, LDWF, Baton Rouge, LA (*Proxy for Senator Jay Luneau*)
Jim Brown, *Citizen Representative from Florida*, Apalachicola, FL
Dan Ellinor, FWC, Tallahassee, FL (*Proxy for Roger Young*)
Read Hendon, *Citizen Representative from Mississippi*, Ocean Springs, MS
Rick Burris, MSDMR, Biloxi, MS (*Proxy for Joe Spraggins*)

Staff

Dave Donaldson, *Executive Director*, Ocean Springs, MS
Nancy Marcellus, *Administrative Officer*, Ocean Springs, MS
Chery Noble, *Administrative Assistant*, Ocean Springs, MS
Steve VanderKooy, *IJF Program Coordinator*, Ocean Springs, MS
Jeff Rester, *SEAMAP/Habitat Coordinator*, Ocean Springs, MS
Gregg Bray, *FIN Program Manager*, Ocean Springs, MS
Joe Ferrer, *Systems Administrator*, Ocean Springs, MS
Deanna Valentine, *Scanning Specialist*, Ocean Springs, MS
Donna Bellais, *ComFIN Programmer*, Ocean Springs, MS
Ali Wilhelm, *Staff Assistant*, Ocean Springs, MS
Angie Rabideau, *Senior Accountant*, Ocean Springs, MS
Charlie Robertson, *Fisheries/Sport Fish Restoration and AIS Coordinator*, Ocean Springs, MS
Sarah Wakefield, *SEAMAP Database Programmer*, Ocean Springs, MS
Keith Wilson, *Staff Assistant*, Ocean Springs, MS

Others

Glenn Constant, USFWS, Baton Rouge, LA
Captain Kindra Arneson, Women's Southern Fisheries Alliance, Venus, LA
Captain Scott Pearce, FWC Law Enforcement, Tallahassee, FL
Jill Hendon, GCRL/USM, Ocean Springs, MS
Luiz Barbieri, FWC/FWRI, St. Petersburg, FL
Chris Bradshaw, FWS/FWRI, Charleston, SC
Haley Gambill, LASG, Houma, LA
Dominique Seibert, LASG, St. Bernard, LA
Darin Topping, TPWD, Rockport, TX
Laura Picariello, TXSG, Galveston, TX

John Fallon, ANI, New Orleans, LA

Virtual:

Andy Strelcheck, NOAA Fisheries, St. Petersburg, FL

D. Donaldson gave a brief overview of the Commission's voting procedures and stated there was a quorum.

D. Donaldson recognized Donna Bellais, ComFIN Programmer, for 20 years employment with the Commission. He stated she has helped to advance the Commission objective and looks forward for her continued employment.

D. Donaldson also stated Scott Bannon, Chair, was not able to attend the meeting and Jason Froeba, 1st Vice Chairman will preside over the meeting.

Adoption of Agenda

C. Nelson *moved* to adopt the agenda with an addition of one item under the Legislative Update. **J. Mareska** seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Approval of Minutes (March 17, 2022)

C. Mace asked to correct the 2021-2022 commercial oyster harvest under the Texas state report to 311,554 sacks. **R. Hendon** *moved* to approve the October 19, 2022 minutes with this change. **D. Ellinor** seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission Standing Committee Reports

Law Enforcement Committee (LEC)

S. Pearce reported the LEC/LETC met Wednesday and there was one motion for the Gulf Council, but no action or motions for the Commission LEC. The *Election of Officers* was postponed until October 2024 to get in sync with the Commission's even year elections. The Committee discussed Council items of concern regarding IFQ reporting and the states' abilities to provide information. He said they provided a response to the Council on limitations for that purpose and they discussed the states' regulations toward the sale of recreationally harvested product. He reported S. VanderKooy updated the committee on the Commission's Mangrove Snapper Profile progress and that Jason Downey is the Enforcement Representative on that Task Force. The profile should have been completed by the end of the year but meeting delays has pushed it back to the summer of 2024. The Commission staff will be sending out requests for *License and Fees* updates in the Spring, along with annual *Rules and Regulations* documents. The state reports have been submitted and are available for review upon request.

Technical Coordinating Committee (TCC)

C. Robertson stated the TCC has two motions for approval. He reported the General Session provided updates and highlights from various projects funded through the GSMFC Aquaculture Pilot Program. The TCC was presented with an update from BOEM on the status of Gulf of Mexico Wind Energy and the results of a statewide survey of pharmaceutical exposure for Red Drum in Florida estuaries. They also discussed the potential implementation of a universal state-managed recreational fishing permit. He said G. Bray updated the group on the plan for year one

of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding and how the Commission will help coordinate a workshop to solicit feedback from state partners to understand how their priorities for improvements to data collection systems align with the objectives of the funding. Funding in subsequent years could be dependent on the outcomes from the workshop. He said S. VanderKooy stated the next species profile will be Black Drum due to increased pressure in recent years and the existing profile being outdated. S. VanderKooy also gave an update on the SuRF funded research projects.

During the Artificial Reef Subcommittee meeting, they met to discuss the artificial reef activities and challenges in Gulf states, including issues with permits, material placement, and monitoring. They also discussed partnerships, critical habitat designation for endangered species, permitting challenges, and coordination in research efforts among states.

During the GulfFIN Committee meeting, several key topics were discussed, including the potential implementation of the Louisiana creel effort survey in Alabama and Mississippi, a MRIP update from NOAA, considerations for re-instituting logbook reporting for federally permitted charter vessels, and the use of BigFIN electronic measuring boards for at-sea observer programs. The committee also discussed the development of the VESL Trip Ticket reporting systems. Lastly, they passed a motion for a resolution honoring Charles "Charlie" Gardner for his dedication to the MRIP survey and asked for the Commission's approval.

MOTION: The Technical Coordinating Committee moves forwarding the draft resolution honoring Charles "Charlie" Gardner to the Commission for their consideration to approve.

D. Ellinor moved to accept the motion. C. Mace seconded and the Commission approved the motion unanimously.

During the Crab Subcommittee meeting, they discussed SuRF-funded work and addressed sea turtle interactions with blue crab trap gear. They also deliberated on FWC's trap regulation changes, research projects on Blue Crab discard mortality and climate change impacts. The States reported on derelict trap removals with small grants allocated for 2024. They closed with considerations to recreate indices of abundance used for a 2011 stock assessment.

During the Molluscan Shellfish Subcommittee meeting, they discussed the status of public oyster resources and restoration efforts in Gulf states, highlighting fluctuations in commercial oyster landings, restoration projects, and the challenges facing oyster populations in each state. They also considered methods for standardizing oyster reef assessment metrics and protocols across Gulf states to assess the health of oyster reefs consistently.

During the SEAMAP Subcommittee meeting, they discussed that SEAMAP received a \$1.6M increase in FY2023 funding. The Subcommittee reviewed the FY2023 sampling results and began planning for 2024, including standardized bottom longline sampling and addressing concerns about NOAA's ability to deploy vessels for research surveys. A motion was made from the Subcommittee to address concerns to NOAA's Office of Marine and Aviation Operations (OMAO).

MOTION: *The TCC moves to approve the SEAMAP Subcommittee to draft a letter to the Rear Admiral of the OMAO concerning lost days at-sea over the past several years. The Technical Coordinating Committee will review the letter prior to forwarding it to the Commission for approval.*

J. Mareska moved to approve the motion. C. Mace seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee (S/FFMC)

J. Froeba reported the Committee met this morning and there are four motions to present for approval.

J. Froeba stated Gregg Bray outlined the status of 2024 GulfFIN funding for data collection and management activities. The proposed amount available for FIN new funding in 2024 totals \$7.8M. The total proposed spending for 2024 for all the high priority GulfFIN jobs is \$9.4M, which would result in a significant deficit but GulfFIN had some significant underspending over the last 3 years that can help offset the funding shortfalls in some areas. After discussion, the committee made the following motion:

MOTION: *The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee moved to accept the proposed funding for the following GulfFIN activities for 2024: Coordination and Administration of FIN Activities; Collecting, Managing, and Disseminating Marine Recreational Fisheries Data; Operation of FIN Data Management System; Trip Ticket Program Operations; Southeast Head Boat Port Sampling; Commercial Conversion Factor Research; and Alabama Snapper Check Implementation for a total budget of \$9.0M and to forward this onto the full Commission for their approval. The motion passed unanimously.*

R. Hendon moved to approve the motion. J. Roussel seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

The committee also discussed continuation of the GulfFIN Biological Sampling program. He said G. Bray stated the proposed costs for Biological Sampling is \$1.3M and no new dedicated monies have been provided by NOAA Fisheries. GulfFIN would like to use underspending from previous years to partially support Biological Sampling efforts. Continued discussions with NOAA Fisheries OST are required to make sure that is an appropriate use of available underspending. If approval is provided, G. Bray will seek approval from the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee to proceed with supporting Biological Sampling with underspending. If a funding shortfall is realized as a result of utilizing underspending, G. Bray will work with states to reduce budgets based on the decision from the State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee.

The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee reviewed the various SEAMAP surveys along with their associated costs. The FY2024 SEAMAP appropriation was \$6.725M and J. Rester stated that SEAMAP received approximately \$6.38M for fishery independent sampling for all three SEAMAP components. All three SEAMAP components based their FY2024 budget on level funding of \$6.725M. The total proposed for the Gulf is \$2.787M. After discussion, the committee made the following motion:

MOTION: The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee moved to accept the proposed funding for SEAMAP surveys for 2024 for a total budget of \$2.78M and to forward this onto the full Commission for their approval. The motion passed unanimously.

P. Banks moved to approve the motion. J. Mareska seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

The committee received an update from Steve VanderKooy on the Interjurisdictional Fisheries State Research funding program. GSMFC is making available \$187,460 in new monies to each state for work in 2024 and budgets have been received by each state. After discussion, the committee made the following motion:

MOTION: The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee moved to accept the proposed funding for IJF activities for 2024 for a total budget of \$937K and to forward this onto the full Commission for their approval. The motion passed unanimously.

D. Ellinor moved to approve the motion. C. Mace seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

The committee received a motion from the GSMFC Technical Coordinating Committee to recommend black drum as the next species for profile development. After discussion, the committee made the following motion:

MOTION: The State/Federal Fisheries Management Committee moved to accept black drum as the next species for profile development. The motion passed unanimously.

R. Hendon moved to approve the motion. C. Mace seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Menhaden Advisory Committee Report

J. Froeba reported Sydney Alhale, NOAA Fisheries, provided a review of the 2023 menhaden season to date. Scott Raborn, LGL Ecological Research Associates, Inc., provided a short overview of the bycatch study they are working on for 2024 in the Gulf menhaden fleet. Carey Gelpi (TPWD) reported on the Texas Cap for 2023. No sets were made in Texas waters in 2023. S. VanderKooy provided a draft summary from the third Menhaden Reference Points workshop and discussed the timeline for the upcoming Stock Assessment Update. He and Amy Shueller indicated that state fishery independent data should be delivered in January with the dependent data expected to be available in April. A preliminary assessment run would be conducted and several conference calls will be set up to work through the assessment over the late spring and summer. The draft report will be ready for the MAC by the October meeting and provided to the TCC for their review in November 2024. Rebecca Hazelkorn, NOAA Fisheries, provided some results from the DWH Restoration Project to develop Methods to Observe Sea turtle Interactions in the Gulf of Mexico Menhaden Purse Seine Fishery. The results will help develop best practices to decrease impacts on sea turtles and marine mammals. Peter Himchak updated the MAC on the audit results from their Marine Stewardship Certification of the Gulf menhaden fishery. There remain some items that the industry would like to address as part of their audit including a MAC

or Commission statement regarding the goals and objectives for the fishery. The industry is continuing to work on their Harvest Control Rule and asked the state agency reps for updated FID to extend the annual index in the control rule portal developed by Robert Leaf and Catherine Wilhelm at USM.

J. Froeba stated Andy Strelcheck, NOAA Fisheries, discussed the \$20M provided to address red snapper and reef fish management through the IRA funding. Part of that funding has been allocated to GSMFC to make infrastructure improvements along with workshops focused on recreational effort validation and improving recreational discard data. Some funding is also being provided to Science Center staff to improve and modernize fishery independent surveys.

J. Froeba reported Laura Picariello (TX Sea Grant) explained the Gulf Commercial Fisherman Program is a conceptual idea to develop formal training programs to help bring new commercial fishermen into the industry. Florida and Texas Sea Grant have developed a steering committee including commercial fishermen and members of the supply chain to develop ideas for what training should look like and are seeking funding for implementing a training program.

J. Froeba reported Jarrad Kosa, US Fish and Wildlife Service, provided a presentation on the Aquatic Species Conservation Gap Analysis. The purposes of the program are to evaluate progress on meeting conservation efforts for priority species, identifying gaps to achieving objectives, and finding opportunities to make program refinements. Some major themes from regional recommendations include improved range-wide planning, increasing partner engagement and coordination, addressing gaps in technical capacity, and emphasizing proactive approaches to conservation.

J. Froeba said Dave Donaldson discussed GSMFC is attempting to get all committees and subcommittees on the same election cycle. To accomplish that his recommendation would be to wait until 2024 to elect new officers for S/FFMC. The current chair and vice-chair agreed to continue in their committee leadership roles until October 2024.

Sea Grant Fisheries Extension Meeting Report

L. Picariello stated she is the current but outgoing Chair for the Sea Grant Fisheries Extension Committee. Dominique Siebert will be the new Chair and Angela Collins will be Vice Chair. They met Wednesday afternoon and each gave a report on their current activities. She said Florida Sea Grant has been focusing on Hurricane recovery and issues concerning losing working waterfronts in Florida. The cost of recovery has many in the industry selling their property to developers not connected to the seafood industry. Florida Sea Grant is continuing to operate their Florida Friendly Fishing Guide (FFFG) Program, their Florida Friendly Angler (FFA) Programs, Fish ID guide for law enforcement, education and outreach on Blue Crab Bycatch and Scallop sorters, and this year's focus for the fellowship in Aquaculture is towards restoration of aquaculture in Florida.

Mississippi/Alabama Sea Grant (MASGC) has been focused on the regional depredation project and that project should be final by the end of this year. They continue to offer the FISHES education class and they are planning to offer online versions of that class to be able to expand to

a broader audience. MASGC has been heavily involved in the Bluefin Tuna restoration project through the DWH NRDA funding.

Louisiana Sea Grant held their Louisiana Fisheries Forward Summit this year for the first time in several years. It had been delayed due to Hurricanes, COVID and other issues. There was less attendance compared to previous years due to the state of the industry, economic challenges, and disaster recovery. They will focus on having a regional summit for the Gulf hoping for more participation. They are heavily involved with Hurricane recovery efforts. The declaration was approved for funding for these efforts but funding has not yet been received. The Freshwater Disaster funds have been received and they hope to start the gear reimbursement programs in November. They have been trying to assist with dialog with NOAA with the state of the shrimp industry in Louisiana with economic failure due to imports, increased operating costs, disaster declarations and other issues. Negative impacts were seen with crawfish this year due to drought and white spot. They have some new soft-shell crab videos and fact sheets available and the Seafood Lab is working on value added products such as smoked reef fish and additional items that could help expand the market for Louisiana seafood products.

Texas Sea Grant reported south Texas is having negative economic impacts at their ports due to the ban of Mexican vessels in US ports. Several bycatch incidents have been reported with Mexican fishing gear that has crossed into US waters causing Pelican, sea turtle and other fish mortalities, and the Texas agents have been asked to document these incidences. There have also been several issues with Space X operations which is next to a wildlife refuge area. Texas Sea Grant has assisted NOAA doing crew surveys for the federal fishing fleets. This is the first time in a very long time that there has actually been an assessment of crews working on federal fishing fleets, as opposed to surveys of just vessel owners for information about operations of the fleet. Texas Sea Grant is also working on an oyster restoration project in Galveston Bay, oyster aquaculture training for displaced fishermen, and they had a BRD project update with 5 potential new designs. Guest Reports were also received from the Audubon Nature Institute and the Return 'Em Right Project.

NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office Comments

A. Strelcheck stated the detailed report is in Tab B of the Briefing Book. He said one of the priorities of the current federal government administration is Equity and Environmental Justice (EEJ) and NOAA Fisheries completed a national EEJ strategy in May of this year and they are working on completing an EEJ strategy for the Gulf region. They have been working with the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC) to rebuild key stocks including greater amberjack and Gulf of Mexico gag grouper. There was an interim rule this year for gag grouper in which they are proposing more permanent regulations for rebuilding the stock. They have also implemented some adjustments to red snapper catch levels and they continue to work on incorporating the great red snapper count into a research track stock assessment that is ongoing.

The for-hire electronic log book program (SEFHIER) was set aside by the courts and the GMFMC is reviewing revising the program to get it started again. The GMFMC is revising and updating the goals and objectives for the individual fishing quota program (IFP) for the commercial sector. He said they will be discussing the goals and steps to improve the IFP Program at the GMFMC meeting next week. The shrimp fishery monitoring units that collect data no longer transmit data

through cellular service so they are in the process of replacing those units with \$850K of funding received from congress. He said wind energy continues to be a hot button issue and they are working closely with the Bureau of Energy Management on lease sites in the Gulf of Mexico. He said their role is assisting with the marine spatial planning and any environmental compliance with the lease sites for wind energy. They are working with partners on several restoration projects including providing technical and environmental compliance planning and consultation for the Mid-Barataria and Mid-Breton sediment diversion projects. He said they continue working with the states to determine funding for various disaster area determinations,

USFWS Region 4 Office Comments

G. Constant reported the Assistant Regional Director, Allan Brown, was unable to attend and he sends his apologies. They usually report on the FWS budget items that are relevant to the Commission but with the current environment in DC he is not going to attempt interpretation of the budget at this time, but A. Brown will keep the Commission updated. He thanked the Commission for administering the Aquatic Nuisance Species Small Grants Program and stated funding for that project should end this year. He briefed the Commission on the Fish Passage program and stated the RFP for that program should be out in the next few months.

NOAA Fisheries Budget Update

D. Donaldson reported both the House and the Senate have passed bills for the FY2024 funding but the House breakdown is not available. The Bills are in the Briefing Book under Tabs C and D. The senate recommended \$113B for NOAA Fisheries which is an overall increase from last year, but there were several decreases on line items within NOAA that is important to the Commission. The Fisheries Data Collections, Survey and Assessments is funded at \$205.4M which is a small decrease from last year. There was concern that NOAA was not prioritizing historical sampling levels and recommended the same levels as 2023 funding to insure the historical survey coverage specifically naming SEAMAP bottom longline and fall trawl surveys in the Gulf of Mexico. There is \$5M for NMFS and the Gulf states collaboration to insure successful implementation of state management of red snapper. The data collection for recreational fisheries is proposed to be funded at the same level. They have a NMFS/Commission collaboration for a fishing effort pilot to determine the best way to collect data to support management decisions. The FINS are level funded and there is specific mention for funding for GulfFIN for biological sampling. There is a new line in for Gulf of Mexico fisheries research where NMFS is encouraged to work with the Commission on fishery independent research for IJF species, but there is no specific value identified. There is \$850K allocated for implementation of the new ELB project but the Commission is not specifically mentioned. The fisheries management program and services are funded at \$138M which is another small decrease from last year. He said it is also interesting that there is SEFHIER funding but the program has been deemed not legal by the courts. Hopefully, the funding can be utilized for other activities. Aquaculture is at \$24M which is \$2M more than last year. The IMTA demonstration project is not specifically mentioned but it will continue. Oyster aquaculture for research and restoration is at level funding but there is no mention of funding to the three Commissions for Regional Aquaculture Pilot programs. The regional councils and fisheries commission line item saw a small decrease from last year, as well as IJF grants and law enforcement. **D. Donaldson** stated they will continue to inform the congressional delegation that to continue GulfFIN and other programs, funding needs to stay level, but hopefully they will approve increases.

Legislative Update

D. Donaldson stated that in the Briefing Book under Tabs E and F, are letters written by the Commission in response to H.R. 3980, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Act of 2023 (NOAA Act), and H.R. 5103, Fishery Improvement to Streamline Untimely Regulatory Hurdles Post Emergency Situation Act (FISHES Act). He said the letter on the NOAA Act is in opposition to the legislation as it would jeopardize the collaboration between the Commission and NOAA Fisheries and the Department of Commerce. There has been no other activity with that act. The letter on the FISHES Act supports this as it would streamline the process of declaring and releasing disaster funding. He then referred to the handout on the Water Quality and Environmental Innovation Act which will utilize unused money from EPA for opportunities for private and public innovators to utilize technologies to develop market-based solutions that address water quality and environmental concerns. Several commissioners had questions and suggestions were made that state agencies should be mentioned as eligible to receive the funding and concerns of pharmaceuticals in the water affecting fish should be mentioned. D. Donaldson will provide congressional staff with the comments and keep the Commission apprised of any action on the legislation he has reported on today.

Discussion of the Future of Seafood Industry in the Gulf of Mexico

D. Donaldson said that he and D. Ellinor discussed the issues with the seafood industry and D. Ellinor suggested adding the agenda item to discuss what the Commission can do to help facilitate the longevity of the seafood industry. **D. Ellinor** said that in Florida the seafood industry is struggling after the Hurricanes and the industry is dwindling due to not receiving disaster funding yet, other industry buying the working water front properties, and shrimp imports. The Commissioners discussed the struggles in each state. Captain Kindra Arneson, Women's Southern Fisheries Alliance, Venus, LA, gave public testimony on her concerns and asked if the Commission can do anything to help solve the problems with the industry. The Commissioners agreed the staff should explore different avenues to have industry and other interested stakeholders meet to discuss the issues affecting the seafood industry and maybe start finding solutions.

Selection of 2024 Lyles/Simpson Award Recipient

D. Donaldson reviewed the process of nominating a Lyles/Simpson Award recipient. **J. Froeba** opened the floor for nominations for the 2024 Lyles/Simpson Award recipient.

C. Nelson moved to nominate Gary Graham from Texas as the 2024 Lyles/Simpson Award recipient. J. Roussel seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Interjurisdictional Fisheries Program

S. VanderKooy said the IJF report is in Tab I of the Briefing Book. He reported the Annual Report for 2022 is complete and will be distributed soon. The Red Drum Management Profile was approved by the TCC and is available on the Commission website. He said they are currently working on the Mangrove Snapper Management Profile and hope to have it completed in 2024. The Commission hosted an Oyster Symposium at the Lodge in Gulf Shores. They discussed the state of the on-bottom traditional oyster harvesting industry and methodologies and techniques that could be used to restore the fishery. He said the IJF SuRF awards should be distributed soon and they continue to do the acoustic and satellite fish tagging.

Aquaculture Program

S. VanderKooy said the report on the 2023 Aquaculture Fall Pilot Projects is in Tab J of the Briefing Book. He said as mentioned previously, the NOAA office of Aquaculture will not provide additional funds for Pilot Projects at this time. He said they started the project in 2016 and the awards focused on offbottom aquaculture projects. He then reviewed the current projects and stated they should be completed in 2024.

SEAMAP

J. Rester said the complete SEAMAP report is in Tab K of the Briefing Book. He said SEAMAP received an extra \$1.6M in FY2023 funding and the Gulf component used the funds to add extra days to the fall shrimp groundfish survey and they will expand the bottom long line survey. He reported SEAMAP has been dealing with loss of sea days due to NOAA personnel issues and the Subcommittee approved writing a letter to OMAO, who operates the vessels, asking them to please find a solution to this problem before it starts negatively impacting the surveys. They held an invertebrate identification workshop in April and the Bottom Longline and Shrimp/Groundfish Work Groups met in May to review their operations manuals and sampling protocols and procedures. He said the Commission continues to manage SEAMAP data and distribute the data to interested parties. The Commission fulfilled 11 data requests since October 2022.

Sportfish Restoration Fisheries Program

C. Robertson said the report is in Tab M of the Briefing Book. He said the SFRP supports activities of the TCC Artificial Reef Subcommittee. They usually meet twice a year and this year they met in conjunction with the Commission meeting this week. They are planning to continue to meet with the Commission in coming years and also with the Atlantic States Commission once a year. He reviewed the activities of the GARMAP assessment of water quality program and stated all information can be viewed on the website. They are actively working on securing increased funding to support Sport Fish Restoration in the Gulf of Mexico and GARMAP continues to make substantial progress to assess water quality at artificial reef locations.

Aquatic Nuisance Species Programs

C. Robertson reported the complete report is in Tab N of the Briefing Book. He said GSARP met in April this year to discuss aquatic invasive species issues. The ANSTF also met in July to discuss national issues and they have a meeting planned with GSARP next month. He reviewed the four Region 4 USFWS AIS Small Grants projects that the Commission administers and stated all projects are scheduled for completion by December 2024. He reported there are no plans to continue this program once these projects are completed. He gave an update on the Invasive Species traveling trunk and said they are in the process of setting up seven start-up kits for the traveling trunk for GSARP member states. He reported the Commission will end its involvement in managing GSARP at the end of the year but will remain a member of the GSARP panel.

Fisheries Restoration Program

C. Robertson said the full report is in Tab O of the Briefing Book. He said the *Return 'Em Right* Program is funded by the Fisheries Restoration Program and as mentioned earlier, Florida Sea Grant is the lead agency in coordinating the outreach and education of the program but the Commission is the lead agency on the monitoring and evaluation portions of the program. He reviewed the goals and objectives of the program and updated the Commission on the progress.

He said they anticipate the completion of the program to be in 2024 and they are planning to have presentations during the general session of the next Commission meeting. They also plan to publish a best release practices manual for reef fish and it will be distributed once it is published. He then recognized Butch Allaya for his contributions to the program and other programs in the Gulf region.

Fisheries Information Network

G. Bray said the FIN Report is in Tab P of the Briefing Book. He gave a brief update on activities for this year and expected activities for fishery dependent data collection for the next year. He said all of the states are switching from paper to electronic reporting only, but there are still a few obstacles to be worked out. He said that as mentioned previously, the biological sampling program has been operating with significant funding shortfalls and they are still working on obtaining funding to continue the program. He stated NOAA did provide permission to use unspent SEFHIER funds for the headboat survey. They will be using funding from the Inflation Reduction Act to make improvements to the data management system and to have workshops focused on recreational effort validation and improving recreational discard data.

Executive Committee Report

D. Donaldson stated the Executive Committee Report was distributed to the Commissioners prior to the meeting (Attachment I). The Commissioners reviewed the report and discussed approving it.

R. Hendon moved to approve the Executive Committee Report. D. Ellinor seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

State Directors' Reports

J. Froeba stated all state reports were submitted before the meeting and are in the Briefing Book. He asked the state Commissioners to give brief highlights of their report.

Florida – D. Ellinor reported the detailed Florida State Report is in Tab S of the Briefing Book. He said red snapper season was extended 17 days for a total of 87 days this year. Florida closed gag grouper on October 23rd to be consistent with the Federal season. The Commission implemented 9 new regions for common snook management. He said BRDs are required in recreational crab traps effective March 1, and red grouper will be closed to recreational harvest July 1 through December 31. He said all details are in the report and he then thanked S. VanderKooy for all the extra work he did to set up the oyster symposium.

Alabama – J. Mareska said the Alabama report is in Tab T of the Briefing Book. He said they were able to distribute all of the 2019 freshwater flooding funds this year. He thanked the Commission staff for helping them accomplish that so quickly. They continue to deploy reefs in artificial reef zones and they continue to release southern flounder, spotted sea trout and Florida pompano as part of the supplemental stocking program out of the Claude Petite Mariculture Center. He said they demonstrated the new dashboard application during the oyster management season meeting and that is available on their website.

Mississippi – R. Burris said the report is in Tab U of the Briefing Book. He reported they were able to deploy two decommissioned menhaden vessels donated by Omega Protein and they used NFTWF funds and items donated by Chevron to deploy other material for artificial reefs. He said legislation was passed to lease 80% of historic and natural oyster reefs and they received over 80 applications and are working on this process. They should begin leasing those areas within the next 2 months. He said the red snapper season is opened for 73 days this year and they have not reached quota. He said they have released massive amounts of spotted sea trout fingerlings in 3 coastal counties and are excited to see the results from that.

Louisiana - J. Froeba said the Louisiana report is in Tab V of the Briefing Book. Louisiana received approval from NOAA in August for their 2019 flood disaster spend plans. They are trying to distribute the funds as quickly as possible and are hoping that some of the programs start before the end of the year. They have also submitted an official disaster declaration request to NOAA for the 2020 and 2021 Hurricanes. They are awaiting the official determination from NOAA and the Secretary of Commerce. The artificial reef program deployed it's first FAD buoy this year and if it is successful they may deploy additional buoys in the future. The shrimp landings for this past year were the lowest on record for brown shrimp since the trip ticket program started in 1999. They are expecting it to be even worse this year because of lower prices than last year. A stock assessment on the red drum fishery was completed in 2022 which showed that the fishery is not currently overfished but is undergoing overfishing. The wildlife and fisheries Commission is working on proposed regulations of a 3 fish limit with 18-24-inch slot, with no fish over the limit and no charter crew retention. He said they are trying to transition all of their state managed stock assessments from the age structure to assessment program model which is a much more advanced model and more data can be used. They are hoping the transition will be completed in the fall of 2024. The regulations for spotted sea trout were adjusted to a 13-inch size limit with a 15 fish bag limit, but that is not final yet. In reference to oysters, they have NRDA funds to implement a meta-population modeling project and they are hoping to better evaluate locations to put cultch plants and brood stock reefs. This modeling should enable the managers to assess the impacts of enhanced and restored reefs and recruitment and how that affects recruitment on other nearby reefs. The model would allow for assessment of individual reefs, network of reefs under current and future conditions.

Texas

C. Mace stated the Texas report is in Tab W of the Briefing Book. He reported that during the 2021-22 Creel survey TPWD conducted 1,115 surveys. They estimate from these surveys private inshore anglers harvested about 928K fishes nearshore, Gulf of Mexico anglers landed an estimated 29,700 fishes, and offshore Gulf EEZ anglers landed an estimated 29,400 fishes. The red snapper season opened in federal waters on June 1 and closed on September 1. State waters opened January 1 and remain open as of today. As of September 22, 85.7% of the Texas quota had been landed. Following two years of recovery after the 2021 freeze and the expiration of emergency regulations on spotted sea trout, the TPWD held public scoping meetings in October to evaluate angler preferences on spotted sea trout regulations. The commercial oyster landings in Texas have been variable over the last 20 years, however, after a recent peak in 2021 of more than 878K sacks, landings have decreased to a record 25 year low of about 218K sacks. Gulf shrimp landings and value have been relatively stable since 2008 ranging between 32M and 52M pounds of tails; however, the last 10 years have shown decreasing landing trends and recent Gulf shrimp

prices have shown a significant decrease because of cheaper shrimp imports. In late September, Texas Congressman Vincente Gonzalez sent a letter to the US Secretary of the Commerce urging a review and requesting a fishery resource disaster determination. During fiscal year 2023 Texas salt water enhancement programs stocked an estimated 23.6 million fingerlings in Texas public waters. Finally, there are numerous projects underway at the Perry R. Bass Marine Fisheries Research Station including work with eastern oysters, penaeid shrimp, red drum southern flounder, lady fish, snook, alligator gar, spotted seatrout, American eels, and the use of EDNA.

Future Meetings

N. Marcellus stated Mississippi will be the host state for the next annual meeting and it will also be the 75th annual meeting. She asked if the Commissioners would like to do something extra or special for this meeting and informed them they are designing a new GSMFC logo for this event. She asked the Mississippi Commissioners to contact her with preferences on where to meet and suggestions for any extra activities for the next meeting.

Publications List and Web Statistics

D. Donaldson stated Tab X and Y in the Briefing Book are informational only but if anyone has any questions to contact him.

With there being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:45pm.

ATTACHMENT I

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE
Thursday, October 19, 2023
Meeting Summary

Draft Agenda

D. Donaldson presented the draft agenda for the Executive Committee meeting. **J. Froeba** moved to accept the agenda as written. The motion was seconded by **D. Boyd**.

Discussion of GSMFC Audit

A. Rabideau reviewed the 12/31/22 Single Audit with the Committee. Jason Keenum, CPA performed the audit. An unqualified opinion was received which means that the financial statements were fairly presented in all material aspects and there were no instances of noncompliance found. **A. Rabideau** pointed out that page 40 of the audit report outlines the summary of the audit results. **R. Burris** moved to accept the audit report. The motion was seconded by **J. Mareska** and passed unanimously.

D. Donaldson gave a status report of the NOAA Grants Management Division (GMD) decision letter concerning an investigation of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) subawards under the FIN program from 2010 - 2019. The Commission and LDWF worked together and submitted a response to GMD. The Commission is currently waiting for GMD to review the response and work with the Commission and LDWF to implement a corrective action plan.

Financial Report

D. Donaldson explained that the financial statements are informational only and did not need a motion for approval. **A. Rabideau** noted that the Commissioners receive the financial report every month by email. She discussed the Statement of Cash Flows and explained that the cash balance is higher than usual due to an advance drawdown made to cover September and October financial obligations during the federal government's switch to a new grant management application. She reviewed the components of the Statement of Revenues and Expenditures reports for the different funds.

Presentation of 2024 Budget

A. Rabideau said the total projected budget for fiscal year 2024 is **\$12,243,156**. She pointed out that the budget was slightly lower than the previous year due to the conclusion of the CARES Act programs in 2023. She noted that page 3 and 4 showed a comparison of the current projected budget to the previous year's projected budget. **D. Donaldson** discussed the decrease in the Aquaculture program. **J. Mareska** moved to accept the 2024 budget. The motion was seconded by **D. Ellinor** and passed unanimously.

Discussion of Hiring a Grants Management Specialist

D. Donaldson discussed the use of a current employee to be trained in subrecipient monitoring. Using current staff would eliminate the need for a new employee while bolstering monitoring activities. The current employee will attend training classes and potentially be certified in Grants Management.

Staff Compensation

The Committee discussed 2024 salary increases for GSMFC staff. After some discussion, **D. Ellinor** moved that for long-term staff, a 5% raise for staff that meet or exceed expectations related to their job performance be put in place for 2024. For new staff, they will receive a 2.5% raise or \$1,000 whichever is more. And the new Grants Management Specialist will receive an additional \$1,200 after she completes the required Grants Management training. The motion was seconded by J. Froeba and passed unanimously.

Other Business

D. Donaldson noted that the Commission recently stepped back from coordination of the invasive species work for the Southeast and asked if there was still interest in the Commission being involved in this issue. He stated that the group did not need to provide an answer at this point but begin thinking about the Commission's future in invasive species. The Commission is planning on taking the annual Gulf Congressional Delegation trip in early 2024.

Being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:55 a.m.