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### **U.S. Shrimp Industry Recommends Changes to Strengthen FDA**

*Tarpon Springs, FL*—On Monday before the Interagency Working Group on Import Safety, the Southern Shrimp Alliance (SSA) advocated that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) adopt rigorous safety systems for imported seafood similar to those found in the European Union, Japan and Canada and the USDA's regulation of imported meat, poultry, and egg products. Currently, the FDA relies solely on point-of-entry inspection of one percent of imported seafood products as the first and last line of defense, a model SSA says makes the United States the most attractive market for contaminated seafood products.

"There is a direct cause and effect relationship between market closures or restrictions on imports into the EU and Japan due to food safety violations and the diversion of contaminated products to the United States," explained John Williams, executive director of the SSA. "If FDA remains less stringent than foreign seafood import regimes, then our regulatory system acts as magnet attracting unsafe and contaminated shrimp imports to the United States."

For example, when the EU banned all Pakistani seafood producers in April 2007 for severe deficiencies in the country's food safety controls, Pakistani shrimp exports to the United States jumped from zero imports from February to May 2007 to over 165,000 pounds in June 2007.

To protect the safety of American consumers and the overall integrity of our nation's food supply, FDA must ensure the safety of seafood imports throughout the product's life cycle.

Reform proposals include requiring that exporting countries administer food safety laws that are at least equivalent to U.S. laws; verifying that individual exporters adhere to such laws; mandatory minimum inspection and testing rates; significant penalties for noncompliance with U.S. safety standards; and, increased cooperation with major seafood importing countries.

Currently, the FDA does not require certification of equivalence and inspects only one percent of imported seafood products.

"Essentially, minimal FDA oversight allows importers to self-certify compliance with U.S. safety standards," said Williams. "Also, the FDA does not quarantine imports at U.S. borders. It instead allows importers, who have financial incentives to use the product they purchased in the most profitable way, to take delivery of even the most suspicious seafood imports. In addition, current FDA enforcement is insufficient to dissuade or prevent port-shopping, the practice of seeking to enter rejected merchandise at other ports of entry."

In stark contrast, the EU guarantees equivalence in food safety controls by conducting foreign on-site inspections and certifying exporting countries and individual exporters prior to importation of a product. In addition, the EU currently inspects 20 percent of seafood imports and has the authority to destroy noncompliant imports.

Japan has a strict risk-based system that includes certification requirements, testing 25 percent of shrimp imports, and significant penalties for noncompliance. Likewise, Canada has strict importer licensing requirements and imposes a minimum standard inspection rate of 15 percent for all imported seafood products.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) demonstrates that the U.S. government is capable of enforcing imported food safety as well as the EU, Japan and Canada. Food safety enforcement policies implemented by USDA for imported meats, poultry, and egg products are similar to those of other major importing countries and include extensive work with exporting countries, higher levels of inspection and testing, strong penalties for noncompliance, and a multilateral exchange of information with other importing countries. Unlike the FDA, which relies heavily on U.S. importers and foreign exporters to enforce U.S. seafood safety standards, the USDA requires certification of foreign equivalence and tests approximately 16 percent of all meat and poultry imports to the United States.

“The health risks posed by contaminated imported seafood are serious, and the failure to implement a meaningful imported food regulatory regime threatens the safety of American consumers, domestic producers, and the overall integrity of our nation’s food supply,” stated Williams. “Congress has expressed significant interest in reforming FDA and SSA looks forward to working with our elected officials on this issue. We hope Congress and the Administration will work together quickly to make FDA function as well as the food safety regimes in other major importing countries.”

SSA is an alliance of the U.S. warmwater wild shrimp fishery from eight states: North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Texas. For more information on the SSA, please visit [www.shrimpalliance.com](http://www.shrimpalliance.com).