



The Southern Shrimp Alliance (SSA) is a non-profit alliance of members of the U.S. shrimp industry in eight states committed to preventing the continued deterioration of America's shrimp industry and to ensuring the industry's future viability. SSA serves as the national voice for the shrimp fishermen and processors in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas.

Quick Links

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BREAKING NEWS

Shrimp Industry Leader Ralph Rayburn Passes



Ralph Rayburn, head of the Texas Sea Grant extension program at Texas A&M University, died on January 31st at his home after suffering a massive heart attack. He was 60 years old.

Rayburn was a longtime leader of the U.S. shrimp industry and strong advocate for environmental stewardship. His career included serving as Executive Director of the Texas Shrimp Association (TSA) for 12 years, during which time he helped resolve a longstanding dispute between conservationists and shrimpers over sea turtles.

Rayburn moved from the TSA to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD), where he served in several capacities. As head of the department's Coastal Fisheries Division, Rayburn implemented the state's shrimp management and artificial reef programs. He spent his last eight years with TPWD as director of intergovernmental affairs, where he was the agency's liaison with the Texas Legislator, U.S. Congress and other governmental and other governmental agencies.

Rayburn is survived by his wife, Elaine, and daughter, Rachel. Words of comfort or memory can be sent to the

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Rayburn's home at 12933 Cedar Bend, College Station, TX 77845.

Donations for the Ralph Rayburn Texas Sea Grant Scholarship Fund can be sent to: Terry Poehl, Texas Sea Grant College Program, 2700 Earl Rudder Freeway South, Suite 1800, College Station, TX 77845. Checks should be made out to Texas A&M University.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

Summary of SSA Actions to Improve Food Safety Enforcement

The Southern Shrimp Alliance has been actively pushing for greater FDA enforcement of food safety standards on imported shrimp products. Lax enforcement by FDA and stringent food safety systems in major importing countries such as the European Union mean that contaminated and poor quality shrimp is diverted to the US market, putting consumers at risk and reducing prices for all shrimp in this market. Here is a list of our most recent activities:

1. SSA documented FDA's failure to meet its internal goals to enforce food safety standards from 1997 to date. We then submitted the timeline of missed benchmarks and proposed reforms to the Senate Finance Committee. The submission stressed the need for Congressionally-mandated deadlines for FDA action after years of empty promises.
2. SSA prepared legislative proposals encompassing our recommended elements for food safety reform bills, and briefed policymakers in Congress and federal agencies about the necessity of such reforms.
3. SSA monitored food safety developments in other major importing countries, including refusals of contaminated shrimp imports by food safety authorities in Canada, Japan, the European Union, and Singapore. We have shared these results with news sources to keep imported food safety reform at the forefront of media reports.
4. SSA analyzed the FDA's Food Protection Plan, the FDA's Subcommittee on Science and Technology, and the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the United States and China with regards

to food safety and drafted a response to these initiatives.

5. SSA met with officials from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Marine Fisheries Service, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection to better understand the role of non-FDA federal regulatory authorities in ensuring the safety of imported food products.

Restaurants Lie about Imported Seafood

In an investigative report by WSB TV (ABC news affiliate in the Atlanta/Northern Georgia area), Red Lobster is caught mischaracterizing the origin of its seafood, including shrimp, amid concerns of import food safety. Elaine Knight, Richard Vendetti, and John Wallace are interviewed on behalf of the U.S. shrimp industry and SSA. Watch the video: <http://www.wsbtv.com/video/15188785/index.html>

REGULATORY UPDATE

Fisheries Ecosystem Plan

The South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council is developing a Fisheries Ecosystem Plan in an effort to protect various species of deep sea coral found along the east coast of Florida up to North Carolina. In January, the Council's Coral and Habitat Advisory Panels proposed a draft plan (Amendment 1) to establish four 'Habitat Areas of Particular Concern' (HAPCs) that would prohibit the use of shrimp trawl and other bottom tending gear over an area of 28,000 square miles.

The west boundary of the HAPC runs north and south through the center of the traditional royal red shrimp harvesting grounds, which are known not to have coral. Placing the boundary where it is currently proposed would approximately halve the traditional fishing area; and, because the line would be so close to the remaining open areas, potential violation costs would effectively eliminate royal red shrimp harvesting on the east coast.

SSA, through its work with the Deepwater Shrimp Advisory Panel, developed an alternative recommendation to move one boundary of one HAPC east by six miles. This 6-mile area is part of a buffer zone, not coral habitat, as evidenced by the current frequent use of shrimp gear in this area. This proposal leaves roughly 95% of the total

HAPC intact, but preserves access to the relatively small areas that are well documented royal red shrimp fishing grounds. Amendment 1 is expected to be finalized for the purposes of receiving public comment in March.

However, the SSA is not the only group developing alternatives. Amendment 2 for this management plan is already under consideration and one of the most alarming provisions is a proposal to effectively declare the entire EEZ under the South Atlantic Council's jurisdiction a HAPC where shrimp trawling would be prohibited everywhere in the Atlantic Ocean except in "allowable gear areas," which have not been defined yet. The intent of this proposal is to restrict the operation of the shrimp fisheries exclusively to the allowable gear areas and to close all other areas of the EEZ from shrimp activity. SSA has strongly opposed this recommendation.

Gulf Aquaculture Efforts Delayed

SSA presented oral and written testimony at the most recent Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council meeting in St. Petersburg on proposals to develop rules for aquaculture in the Gulf of Mexico. Our comments:

1. Urged the Council to take a measured and well researched approach to the issues surrounding open water aquaculture, such as the environmental effects of non-native and altered fish and the potential economic costs of additional loss of shrimp trawling areas. By slowing down the work on the Amendment, many missing details in the plan can be filled-in and evaluated;
2. Thanked the Council for adopting SSA's previous requests to remove shrimp from the list of species authorized for offshore aquaculture and to prohibit offshore aquaculture facilities from being located in traditional shrimp fishing areas; and,
3. Urged the Council to mandate that offshore aquaculture operators clean-up debris from storms, meet U.S. citizenship requirements comparable to that for U.S. flag fishing vessels, and be subject to a level of monitoring through NMFS observers comparable to U.S. fisheries.

The Council is expected to further delay action on this plan.

Red Snapper Management Plan Finalized

On January 29, 2008, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) published a final rule implementing regulatory actions (Amendment 27/14) to reduce the red snapper catch, bycatch, and discard mortality in the directed commercial and recreational fisheries, as well as in the shrimp fishery. These regulations are designed to ensure a reasonable probability of ending red snapper overfishing by 2010 and rebuild the stock by 2032 in accordance with new Magnuson-Stevens Act mandates.

The rule requires that shrimpers reduce red snapper bycatch mortality by 74% from the average levels five years ago in the 10-30 fathom areas of the western Gulf. SSA was successful in building into the rule a relaxation of the shrimp bycatch reduction requirement as the red snapper stocks recover.

According to the most recent NMFS preliminary report, there was a shrimp effort reduction of nearly 84% in 2007 from the base years of 2001-2003. Since the effort has been reduced more than the mandated goal, no additional closures are expected under the new rule.

Shrimp Vessels in Gulf Capped at 1,928

NOAA announced that only 1,928 federal permits were issued to shrimp vessels in the Gulf of Mexico under the ten-year federal permit moratorium program. A total of 2,666 had been eligible to apply. Of the 1,928 permits issued, 16 are currently not associated with a vessel and their status could change. In any case, the Gulf fleet will be capped at the 1,928 level for the next ten years. In 2007, only 1,162 of the 1,928 permits actually recorded shrimp landings.

MEMBERSHIP UPDATE

SSA to Host DC Shrimp Dinner

On February 12, U.S. shrimpers from eight states will start to arrive in Washington, DC. While in the nation's capitol, SSA members will bring priority issues to our Congress and the Administration. Items to be discussed include enforcement of U.S. trade laws, fair and equitable distributions of CDSOA (Byrd) funds, improved imported seafood safety, and marketing among other matters.

SSA will host its annual shrimp dinner on the evening of the 13th to provide congressional offices and federal agencies with the opportunity to meet shrimping families from their districts and to sample some U.S. wild-caught shrimp. The South Carolina shrimpers have volunteered to prepare their local catches for the event this year.