



Southern Shrimp Alliance

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April 24, 2023

Letter of Support for the Blakeslee *et al.* proposal for North Carolina Sea Grant's 2024-2026 Biennial Competitive Core Research Funding

Dear Review Committee,

My name is John Williams, and I am the Executive Director of the Southern Shrimp Alliance (SSA), an organization that brings together shrimp fishermen, shrimp processors, and other members of the industry from eight U.S. states along the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic coast, including North Carolina. The SSA's mission is to ensure the "continued vitality and existence of the U.S. shrimp industry", and therefore, the recent emergence and spread of shrimp diseases, like shrimp Black Gill (sBG), along U.S. coastlines is of concern to the Alliance. I am writing with a letter of support for the proposal that Dr. April Blakeslee from East Carolina University (Greenville, NC) and Dr. James Morley from the Coastal Studies Institute (Wanchese, NC), and their team, are submitting to the North Carolina Sea Grant's 2024-2026 Biennial Competitive Core Research Funding. The Blakeslee and Morley team represent the first research group in North Carolina examining sBG in commercially-valuable penaeid shrimp, as well as common grass shrimp that may be serving as reservoir hosts of sBG within North Carolina estuaries.

In 2022, the SSA supported an MS student, Chloe Gabriel, who is co-advised by Dr. Blakeslee and Dr. Morley, with a student scholarship. The SSA gives out sixteen \$1000 scholarships per year to two students within each of the 8 participating states, and Chloe was one of the North Carolina recipients in 2022. This scholarship has helped to support Chloe's MS research at East Carolina University, in which she sampled several sites with the Blakeslee and Morley team in the inner and outer Pamlico Sound in 2022 to document the infection prevalence of sBG using a combination of microscopy and PCR-based methodologies. The SSA is very interested in the results of Chloe's research, as well as continuing to see the Blakeslee and Morley team advance understanding of the disease's impacts on shrimp populations in shrimp nursery grounds of North Carolina's extensive estuarine system. We therefore support the team's research proposal to North Carolina Sea

Grant, which if funded, would expand their sampling to include 3 more estuaries and would also provide vital environmental and physiological data on sBG infection rates and infection virulence in North Carolina, which represents an emerging region for the disease's spread. Early documentation and understanding of the impact of sBG on shrimp populations are vital to any actions that can be taken. Please accept my letter of support for this project and also my commitment to continuing to work with this team as they work towards documenting the impacts of this disease on this vital U.S. fishery.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "J".

John Williams
Executive Director
Southern Shrimp Alliance
Tarpon Springs, FL 34688