



## **Louisiana Shrimp Task Force**

### **Congressional Meeting Briefing January 2026**

## **Meeting Attendees**

Louisiana Shrimp Task Force (STF)

- Andrew Blanchard – Chairman STF
- Acy Cooper – Co-Chairman STF
- Lance Nacio – STF Member
- Rodney Olander – STF Member
- Ronnie Anderson- Vice President Louisiana Shrimp Association

## **Purpose of the Meeting:**

**To provide an overview of urgent federal issues impacting the U.S. wild-caught shrimp industry and outline priority actions**

## **Index**

### **1. Shrimp Imports & Tariff Relief**

- Recognition of 2025 tariffs
- Proposals for tariff reinvestment
- Legal pathways for trade injury relief
- Enforcement gaps and mislabeling CONCERNS

### **2. Delays in Disaster Relief Funding**

- Chronic NOAA delays
- Real-world impacts on harvesters
- Congressional solutions for timely aid

### **3. American Restore Seafood Act (EO 14276)**

- Legislative gaps in the Executive Order
- Key priorities for a comprehensive federal response
- Accountability for generational economic harm

### **4. Inshore Turtle Excluder Device (TED) Mandate: Opposition**

- Legal challenge by LSA
- Scientific and operational objections
- Federalism and Commerce Clause concerns
- Oceana's campaign and reputational harm

### **5. Industry Reputation and Red Listing**

- Harmful Mislabeling
- Market Confusion
- Economic Harm
- Reputation Damage
- Louisiana mandates strict tow-time limits

### **6. Conclusion: A Working Waterfront in Crisis**

# Shrimp Imports and Tariff Relief

## World Trade Organization (WTO) Compliant Ways to Use Tariff Revenues to Support U.S. Shrimpers

WTO does **not** prohibit a country from using its own tariff revenue however it wants. What the WTO *does* regulate is **how** government support is structured — specifically whether it becomes a *prohibited subsidy* (like export subsidies) or an *actionable subsidy* that distorts trade.

If the grant is not tied to export performance or to using domestic over imported inputs, it is WTO-compliant.

### WTO-Safe Grant Categories for U.S. Shrimpers

#### 1. Domestic Industry Adjustment Grants (Completely Allowed)

These are explicitly permitted under WTO rules as part of a country's right to manage the domestic impact of imports.

Examples:

- Income support for shrimpers harmed by unfair imports
- Grants to offset increased fuel, gear, or insurance costs
- Disaster-related or economic hardship relief
- Transition assistance for small businesses in import-impacted sectors

**WTO-safe because:** They are not tied to exports or production quotas.

#### 2. Modernization & Capital Improvement Grants

These are classic “green box” domestic support measures.

Examples:

- Vessel upgrades
- Refrigeration, ice machines, dock improvements
- Processing facility modernization
- Safety equipment and compliance upgrades

#### 3. Workforce Development & Training Grants

Examples:

- Crew training

- Safety certifications
- Skilled labor development
- Apprenticeship programs

**WTO-safe because:** Training is a non-trade-distorting domestic support.

#### 4. Marketing & Labeling Grants (Domestic Only)

Examples:

- “Wild-Caught American Shrimp” campaigns
- Domestic consumer education
- Branding and traceability programs
- Restaurant and retailer outreach

**WTO-safe because:** Domestic marketing is allowed.

**Avoid:** Anything that promotes exports specifically.

**WTO-safe because:** They improve efficiency and safety, not export performance.

#### 5. Scientific Research & Stock Assessment Grants

Examples:

- Bycatch reduction research
- Stock assessments
- Water quality monitoring
- Gear innovation

**WTO-safe because:** Research is explicitly allowed under WTO rules.

#### 6. Infrastructure & Community Resilience Grants

Examples:

- Port improvements
- Ice houses
- Fuel docks
- Working waterfront preservation

**WTO-safe because:** Infrastructure is non-specific and benefits the entire community.

**Any grant that supports domestic shrimpers, improves resilience, strengthens communities, or modernizes the fleet — as long as it is not tied to exports or domestic-content requirements — is WTO-compliant.**

# Disaster Relief Delays

## Expedite Disaster Grants for Commercial Fishermen

### 1. Impose Mandatory Federal Timelines

The FISHES Act now requires disaster funds to be distributed **within 90 days** after the Secretary of Commerce receives a complete spending plan. This is the strongest precedent you can leverage.

**What to push for next:**

- A **30-day deadline** for NOAA to review state disaster requests
- A **60-day deadline** for Commerce to approve spend plans
- Automatic release of funds if deadlines are missed

This eliminates the years-long delays fishermen currently face.

### 2. Reduce the Number of Agencies in the Pipeline

Current delays occur because funds must pass through:

- NOAA
- State agencies
- Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (or Gulf equivalent)
- Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

The FISHES Act specifically targeted this bottleneck because “numerous state and federal entities” slow the process.

**Fix:** Create a **single-agency distribution model** for Gulf fisheries — ideally Commerce → State → Fishermen.

### 3. Require Pre-Approved “Standing” Spend Plans

States should not have to write a new plan every time a disaster occurs.

**Solution:**

- Pre-approve a **template spend plan** for each fishery
- Allow automatic activation when a disaster is declared

This cuts months off the timeline.

## 4. Allow Direct Payments to Fishermen

Direct payments are WTO-safe and legally allowed. They also avoid administrative delays caused by intermediaries.

**Examples of fast, compliant payments:**

- Income-loss compensation
- Emergency operating grants
- Gear replacement grants
- Fuel/insurance offset grants

These are domestic, non-export-contingent supports — fully WTO-compliant.

## 5. Require the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to Act Within a Fixed Window

Sen. Murkowski specifically blamed OMB for major delays in disaster funding.

**Fix:**

- Statutory 30-day OMB review limit
- Automatic approval if OMB fails to act

This is one of the biggest choke points you can eliminate.

## 6. Create a Dedicated Disaster Relief Account for Fisheries

Alaska's senators recently refilled the Commerce disaster account with **\$300 million** to prevent funding shortages.

For the Gulf, Congress could:

- Establish a **permanent, pre-funded disaster account**
- Allow immediate drawdowns when disasters are declared

This prevents the “wait for appropriations” delays.

## Bottom Line

The most effective reforms — and the ones with proven bipartisan support — are:

- **Strict federal deadlines**
- **Fewer agencies involved**
- **Pre-approved spend plans**

- Direct payments to fishermen
- Automatic fund release
- A dedicated, pre-funded disaster account

These changes would turn a multi-year process into a **90-day or faster** payout system.

## Restore American Seafood Act

### Status of the American Restore Seafood Act

The American Restore Seafood Act is **not a law**. It currently exists only as **Executive Order 14276**, signed in April 2025. Federal agencies—primarily NOAA and NMFS—are in the early stages of implementing the EO through regulatory reviews, public comment periods, and internal planning. No congressional bill has been introduced or passed to formally codify the Act, meaning **there is no funding, no mandates, and no statutory authority** behind it yet. The next phase depends on agency rulemaking and whether Congress chooses to advance legislation.

### Core Objectives

- Strengthen U.S. seafood competitiveness and reduce dependence on imports.
- Remove or revise federal regulations that hinder domestic harvesters.
- Improve enforcement against IUU (illegal, unreported, unregulated) imports.
- Modernize fisheries data, assessments, and management tools.

### Policy & Regulatory Focus

- NOAA/NMFS must review and streamline burdensome rules.
- Reevaluate marine monument fishing restrictions.
- Expand and enforce SIMP traceability for high-risk imports.
- Align reforms with Magnuson-Stevens Act science requirements

## Opposition to Inshore Turtle Excluder Device (TED) Mandate: Regulatory Overreach, Industry Impact, and the Case for State Authority

### Overview

The proposed Inshore Turtle Excluder Device (TED) mandate represents one of the most consequential regulatory shifts facing the Gulf shrimp industry in decades. While offshore TED requirements have long been established, extending these mandates into shallow, inshore waters introduce a fundamentally different set of biological, economic, and operational challenges. The inshore fleet—composed largely of small, family-owned vessels—operates in environments where turtle interactions are already extremely rare, and where existing bycatch reduction

devices (BRDs) have proven effective. Imposing offshore-style TED requirements in these areas is neither scientifically justified nor economically sustainable.

## **Regulatory Outreach and Industry Engagement**

Meaningful regulatory policy must be built on transparent outreach and genuine collaboration with the communities it affects. Unfortunately, the rollout of the inshore TED mandate has been marked by limited consultation, inconsistent communication, and a lack of region-specific data. Fishermen repeatedly report that their operational realities—shallow depths, debris-heavy waters, and narrow profit margins—were not adequately considered.

Stakeholders have consistently requested:

- Clear scientific justification for inshore turtle-interaction assumptions
- Economic impact assessments specific to small-vessel fleets
- Pilot programs or phased implementation rather than immediate mandates
- Recognition of existing BRD performance in reducing bycatch

These requests remain largely unaddressed, underscoring the need for a more balanced regulatory process.

## **Support for Louisiana Shrimp Associations' Legal Challenge**

The Louisiana Shrimp Association (LSA) has taken a leading role in challenging the mandate through the courts, arguing that the rule exceeds federal authority, lacks adequate scientific grounding, and imposes disproportionate burdens on inshore fishermen. Supporting LSA's legal challenge is essential not only for the survival of the inshore fleet but also for ensuring that federal agencies remain accountable to statutory requirements for evidence-based rulemaking.

LSA's position emphasizes:

- Insufficient data demonstrating turtle interactions in inshore waters
- Failure to consider less burdensome alternatives
- Economic harm to small-scale operators
- Procedural deficiencies in the rulemaking process

Backing this challenge is a defense of both industry livelihoods and regulatory integrity.

## **State Authority and Local Management Expertise**

Coastal states possess deep, place-based knowledge of their fisheries and have long managed inshore shrimping through state-level authority grounded in biological monitoring, habitat understanding, and community engagement. Louisiana's management system is widely recognized for its sustainability, adaptability, and responsiveness.

Federal preemption in this context disregards:

- State-collected biological data showing minimal turtle presence in inshore waters
- Established state enforcement systems that already ensure responsible fishing practices
- Local expertise in balancing conservation with economic survival

Restoring and respecting state authority is critical to maintaining a management framework that actually works for the resource and the people who depend on it.

## Industry Reputation and Shrimp Falsely Red-Listed by Oceana

Oceana's **false red-listing of Louisiana inshore shrimp** has created a damaging and inaccurate narrative about the state's fishery. Their designation ignores both the scientific record and the extensive conservation measures already required under Louisiana law. In particular, Louisiana mandates **strict tow-time limits** for all inshore shrimp vessels — a proven, enforceable measure designed to protect any sea turtles that may enter the nets. These tow-time requirements have been in place for decades and are recognized by federal agencies as an effective alternative to TEDs in shallow, debris-heavy waters.

Despite this, Oceana's listing portrays Louisiana inshore shrimping as unregulated and harmful to turtles, a claim that is directly contradicted by state enforcement data and long-standing conservation compliance. The result has been:

- **Market confusion** among buyers and retailers who rely on third-party ratings
- **Economic harm** to domestic shrimpers competing against cheaper imports
- **Reputational damage** to a fishery that meets or exceeds conservation requirements

Correcting this misinformation is essential to restoring consumer confidence and ensuring that sustainability assessments reflect actual, on-the-water practices rather than advocacy-driven assumptions.

## Ways the Federal Government Can Push Back on Oceana's Claims

- Issue formal scientific corrections through NOAA or NMFS to publicly clarify that Louisiana inshore shrimping uses state-mandated tow-time limits that protect sea turtles.
- Publish federal technical memos that restate the biological data on turtle presence in inshore waters and correct mischaracterizations used in Oceana's red-listing.
- Require transparent methodology disclosure from any organization using federal data in sustainability ratings, ensuring Oceana must show its sources and assumptions.
- Conduct congressional oversight hearings to examine discrepancies between federal science and third-party red-listing claims.
- Strengthen interagency coordination so NOAA, NMFS, and the Department of Commerce jointly reaffirm the effectiveness of Louisiana's tow-time requirements.
- Release public-facing fact sheets that clearly explain the conservation measures already in place in Louisiana's inshore fishery.

- Ensure federal procurement programs do not rely on unverified third-party ratings when purchasing seafood for federal agencies.
- Protect domestic producers in trade policy by preventing inaccurate red-listings from influencing import standards or market access.
- Elevate state agency data in federal decision-making to counterbalance advocacy-driven claims.
- Expand stakeholder consultation so fishermen, state biologists, and industry groups have a formal role in sustainability assessments.

## Conclusion: A Working Waterfront in Crisis

The U.S. wild-caught shrimp industry is experiencing the deepest collapse in its history. Dumped imports have destroyed dockside prices, disaster aid arrives years too late, and federal mandates continue to fall hardest on the smallest, safest, and most sustainable boats in the country. Coastal families who have harvested American seafood for generations are now fighting simply to survive.

This crisis is not the result of poor stewardship or declining effort. It is the direct consequence of **federal inaction, inconsistent enforcement, and scientific and regulatory failures** that have distorted markets, misrepresented our fishery, and imposed rules that do not reflect real-world conditions in the Gulf.

For decades, fishermen have carried the burden of policies built on flawed data, outdated assumptions, and uneven oversight. Meanwhile, foreign producers—operating under standards that would never be allowed in the United States—continue to dominate the market with little accountability.

To rebuild what has been lost, we need **scientific and regulatory accountability** at every level of federal decision-making. That means transparent methodologies, accurate stock assessments, consistent enforcement, and rules that reflect the realities of small-boat fisheries rather than theoretical models.

The path forward is clear:

- Fix the science.
- Fix the process.
- Fix the policies that have pushed an iconic American industry to the brink.

With fair treatment, honest data, and responsible regulation, the Gulf Coast shrimp industry can recover and continue feeding this nation with pride. Without these changes, we risk losing not just an industry, but a culture, a heritage, and the working waterfronts that define our coastal communities.