

Office of the Governor
State of Louisiana

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August 30, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

I write to you today on behalf of the many small, family-owned commercial shrimping businesses in Louisiana that are at risk of closing because of the increasing difficulty for them to be competitive in the marketplace, as well as all of those around Louisiana and our nation who consume shrimp. While the issue is an economic emergency for our generations-old shrimping families across the state, the more pressing and important issue is one of public health. Due to the nature of commerce and food safety regulations, I believe action is necessary at the federal level and am requesting you and your administration to review any and all relief available to alleviate the imminent risk of our local family businesses closing and to protect public health. I have directed my Secretary of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries to draft a request for a federal fisheries disaster declaration from Secretary Raimondo. Based on my briefing on the levels and types of antibiotics found in imported shrimp, I am respectfully requesting additional funding for testing of imported shrimp by the Food and Drug Administration, as well as support for random testing, seizure and destruction of shrimp that contain banned substances or exceed acceptable levels, and implementation of a quota on the amount of shrimp imported from other countries.

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office¹, the FDA tested 2.2% of the entry lines for imported seafood into the U.S. for food safety issues, but only 0.1% of nearly one million seafood entry lines for drugs of concern to the FDA. Of that tested, 12% of the imported shrimp tested positive for unsafe residues and of those imports refused by the FDA, 54% were shrimp. The GAO estimated that there is only a 1 in 1,000 chance that a seafood shipment from a foreign processing facility would be chosen by the FDA to be tested. The FDA reported that the testing is limited by available resources. In light of staggering numbers reported by the GAO, I am requesting additional funding be made available to the FDA for the purpose of increasing the testing, including random testing, of the shrimp being imported into the country for human consumption. Also of concern is the FDA's practice to simply reject imports that test positive for drugs of concern given the low possibility that a shipment will be chosen by the FDA for testing. I have been advised that it is common practice for importers to "dock-hop" in the U.S., where in instances the FDA has rejected an imported seafood product, the processor or producer will simply take its chance at a

¹ U.S. Government Accountability Office, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-17-443.pdf>, September 2017

different port of entry in the country. In addition to increased funding, I am also requesting the implementation of a seize-and-destroy rule by the FDA for those imports that test positive for banned substances. It is vitally important to the health and safety of the public that imported products containing banned substances not be given a second chance to enter the country.

Intensifying inspections of shrimp imports is also necessary for the detection of pathogens that could be detrimental to Louisiana's indigenous ecosystem. Recently, the Saudi Arabian Food and Drug Authority moved to embargo shrimp imports from India due to the alarming presence of White Spot Syndrome Virus (WSSV). This virus is an extremely virulent shrimp pathogen that rapidly replicates and can cause 100% mortality in shrimp populations.² Crustacean species, including our domestic freshwater, brackish, and sea water shrimp and crab species, are the major hosts of WSSV with detection in 39 families worldwide and 13 non-crustacean species as vectors or hosts.³ Understandably, we are very concerned that this pathogen could infiltrate our native species. There are a number of avenues for WSSV to enter the waters of Louisiana including:

- the release of liquid and solid waste from processing plants,
- the use of frozen imported bait shrimp, and
- fecal transport through the consumption of shrimp waste by birds and other scavengers.⁴

This risk compels us to implore your administration to take bold measures in amplifying scrutiny over shrimp imports and safeguarding our indigenous ecosystems.

Louisiana has a longstanding record of being the top shrimp producer in the U.S. The state is a financial benefactor from the shrimp industry and will take necessary actions to protect this economically and culturally important industry. Equally as important as the efforts being made to ensure the safety of imported seafood products are the efforts necessary to ensure market conditions exist that allow our domestic shrimping industry to compete with imported products. Here in Louisiana, commercial shrimping is a generations-long family industry. At a recent meeting with our local shrimpers, however, I was told that these family businesses are on the verge of extinction because of the extremely low dockside shrimp prices due to the large influx of imported shrimp on the market. Between what our shrimpers are paid for their product and the increase in costs associated with maintaining boats and fuel necessary for their livelihoods, Louisiana shrimpers are at a critical turning point in making the decision to continue to pass down the family business to the next generation or to close up shop and let the next generation find another profession. To this end, Louisiana will be pursuing a federal fisheries disaster declaration from the Department of Commerce to assist with the economic impact that is devastating our local shrimpers, but I am also requesting support for implementation of a quota on imported shrimp. Seafood imports account for approximately 94% of the volume of seafood sold in the U.S., and shrimp account for the highest percent

² Pradeep B, Rai P, Mohan SA, Shekhar MS, Karunasagar I. Biology, Host Range, Pathogenesis and Diagnosis of White spot syndrome virus. *Indian J Virol.* 2012 Sep;23(2):161-74. doi: 10.1007/s13337-012-0079-y. Epub 2012 Aug 14. PMID: 23997440; PMCID: PMC3550756.

³ Desrina, Slamet B. Prayitno, Marc C. J. Verdegem, Johan A. J. Verreth, Just M. Vlask, White spot syndrome virus host range and impact on transmission. *Reviews in Aquaculture.* Vol. 14 Num. 4. p.1843-1860.

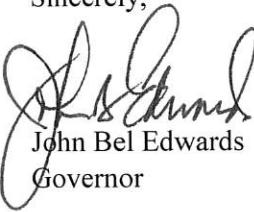
⁴ Cara Reville, Jennifer Al-Beik, Dawn Meehan-Meola, Zhenkang Xu, Michele L. Goldsmith, William Rand, Acacia Alcivar-Warren. White Spot Syndrome Virus in Frozen Shrimp Sold at Massachusetts Supermarkets. *Journal of Shellfish Research*, 24(1), 285-290, (1 January 2005)

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of imports averaging around 23%.⁵ Shrimpers have a long, rich history in Louisiana and it is my hope that as a state, and a nation, we support our domestic producers.

I urgently request that increased funding and inspections on imported shrimp products be aggressively pursued, and that you and your administration support our local shrimpers through implementation of measures discussed above. I support the Louisiana shrimp industry and its cultural and economic importance to not only Louisiana, but to the entire nation.

Should you need additional information, please contact Assistant Secretary Patrick Banks of the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries at 225.765.2370 or via email at pbanks@wlf.la.gov. Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

John Bel Edwards
Governor

cc: The Hon. Gina Raimondo
Secretary, U.S. Dept. of Commerce
The Hon. Robert M. Califf, M.D., MACC
Commissioner, Food and Drug Administration

⁵ FDA U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Activities for the Safety of Imported Seafood. February 2023.