



NOAA Fisheries withdraws Proposal to Expand Seafood Import Monitoring Program

NOAA Fisheries announced November 14, 2023 its decision to withdraw the proposed rule to expand the Seafood Import Monitoring Program (SIMP), a risk-based program for targeted species of seafood imported into the U.S. In response to the extensive public feedback on the proposed rule, the agency will instead conduct a broad review of the program to explore ways to enhance and strengthen its overall impact and effectiveness.

SIMP establishes reporting and recordkeeping requirements for nearly half of all U.S. seafood imports to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and misrepresented seafood from entering U.S. commerce. By providing a screening and deterrent tool for IUU fish and fish products, and misrepresented seafood products entering the U.S., SIMP strengthens our national economy, global food security and the sustainability of our shared ocean resources.

“This decision to withdraw the proposed rule stems from the extensive and varied feedback during the public comment period, and our overarching interest in strengthening the impact and effectiveness of our traceability efforts,” said Alexa Cole, director of NOAA Fisheries’ Office of International Affairs, Trade and Commerce. “We’ve received feedback from our stakeholders indicating that SIMP may not fully meet their expectations, and now is the appropriate time to review the program’s scope, format and overall objectives as we plan for the future.”

As part of the program review, NOAA Fisheries is committed to engaging and seeking broad input on SIMP from stakeholders, including industry, non-governmental organizations, other federal agencies, congressional representatives and foreign governments. While NOAA Fisheries conducts its review, SIMP will continue to operate in its current form and capacity, with the list of priority species subject to program requirements remaining unchanged and all program requirements remaining in effect.

In December 2022, NOAA proposed the rule to increase the number of species currently subject to SIMP (from approximately 1,100 individual species to approximately 1,670 individual species), to minimize the risk of mislabeling and product substitution that is used to bypass SIMP requirements, and to make additional program modifications and improvements. The comment period closed in March 2023. NOAA Fisheries is committed to the ongoing development and enhancement of SIMP as part of the agency’s comprehensive approach to combating IUU fishing and seafood fraud.



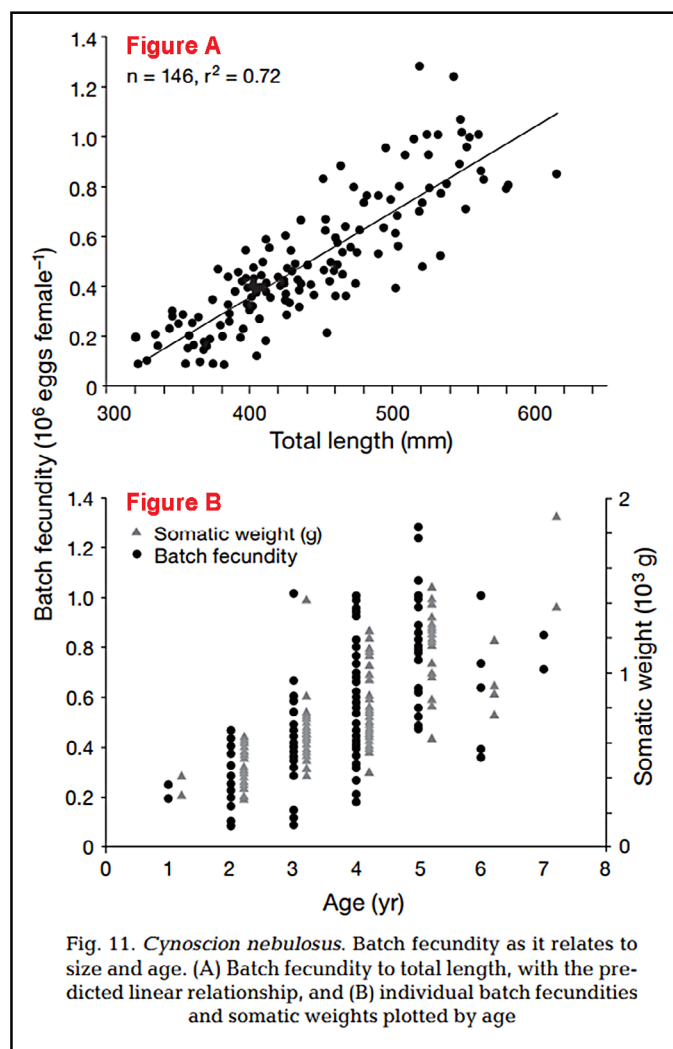
**NOAA
FISHERIES**

The Efficacy of Slot Limits

Fisheries management is a tricky business. Balancing the needs and wants of fishers as well as the biology and ecology of the ecosystems where we fish is challenging. A primary tenet of fisheries management is that fisheries management isn't about managing fish, it's about managing people. However, considering we are working with living organisms, there is a case to be made that leveraging the basic biology of fish in our management schemes can make management actions more efficient. Slot limits are a management tool often used in stock rebuilding when either a stock is overfished and/or overfishing is occurring. Slot limits designate a size class of fish as exploitable; with a minimum harvest size limit set after a fish has theoretically (although not always measured) sexually matured and a maximum size limit where fish fecundity has begun to peak. These minimum and maximum size limits allow for two management outcomes, 1) fish can avoid fishing mortality before they reach maturity and 2) the largest most fecund fish are protected from fishing. However, one term that largely needs to be defined in this management strategy is fecundity, or the magnitude of spawn a single fish can produce.

What is fecundity?

Fecundity, as was just mentioned, is an individual's potential reproductive capacity. For humans, our reproductive capacity is easy to measure, however we focus more on actual number of offspring as opposed to number of potential offspring. On average, the fertility rate (actual number of offspring) of human women is ~2 births over their lifetime (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/), but the fecundity (or reproductive potential) is much higher. For organisms (i.e., fish) where we can't easily measure fertility, we measure reproductive potential by measuring the size and density of gametes in the gonads. In fisheries management, we mainly focus on the reproductive capacity of females (e.g., the total number of eggs within the ovaries) because fish reproduction is rarely limited by the number of males or the abundance of sperm.



Why protect older fish?

For many species of fish, the number of eggs they carry is strongly correlated with age. Unlike humans, where lifetime fecundity decreases with age (because new eggs are not created during a woman's lifetime) a fish's fecundity increases as they grow. Year-over-year increases in age can be dramatic, increasing linearly i.e., every one year is a one-step addition in the number of eggs. For example, spotted seatrout (*Cynoscion nebulosus*), increased size and increased age are very strongly correlated with egg production. The figure here shows specifically how that relationship works from a study on seatrout reproductive potential by Lowerre-Barbieri et al. in 2009:

Figure A is the relationship between fish size (x-axis, Total length [mm]) and "batch fecundity" on the y-axis. Batch fecundity is a scientific estimation of the total number of eggs that a female carries that can be released in a single spawning event.

Figure B shows the same relationship but instead of size, batch fecundity (y-axis, black dots) and weight (second y-axis, grey triangles) are plotted against age. According to this study, on the higher end for fish that are five years old, a female spotted seatrout can contain greater than 1.2 million eggs.

Fecundity and slot limits

To apply this principle to a real-world scenario, we'll focus on the recently instituted slot limit for spotted seatrout here in Louisiana (starting Nov. 21, 2023, 13 – 20 inches; with two fish in the angler's bag limit greater than 20 inches allowable). According to this paper (with the caveat of being done in a different place at a different time), a spotted seatrout at 13 inches (330 mm) can hold

around 200,000 eggs at a given time; however, a fish at the upper end of the slot limit 20 inches (~ 500 mm) can hold as many as two-times (400,000 eggs) to five-times (1 million eggs) as many eggs. For the purposes of management, protecting large seatrout may be

an effective way to quickly increase the fecundity per individual in a population and increase fishery production (addition of new fish biomass into the fishery).

Arguments against slot limits

Some opponents of slot limits argue that artificially altering the age structure of fish by protecting larger individuals may alter the ecological relationships among fish. However, the management benefits largely outweigh the ecological concerns, especially in scenarios where the density of fish is low (e.g. the fishery is overfished and overfishing is occurring) which reduce the likelihood that there is any sort of resource limitation for fish to grow. Additionally, for coastal fish like spotted seatrout, the environment that they live in is typically highly productive (i.e. low-salinity estuaries) with many other co-occurring species that forage on the same food as seatrout. Specifically in these scenarios where the density of fish is low and resources are not limited altering the size structure of an individual species may have a dampened effect.

Among all the potential management actions that can be instituted for fishery managers, adjusting size specific catch rates is a common one. Protecting young fish that have yet to spawn, and older fish that are the most prolific spawners, can be an effective tool to maintain the same rate of fishing and increase the addition of new fish biomass. This type of management action has been largely successful for other marine fish, i.e., red drum (*Sciaenops ocellatus*) that is highly touted as a management success story, being rebuilt from a near collapse in the 1980s. Management actions like slot limits only work if 1) rules are followed and 2) under and over-sized fish are released and survive release. While there is no perfect management tool, and certainly no single path to rebuilding overexploited living resources, slot limits are just one way to maintain sustainable harvest and keep fishers fishing.

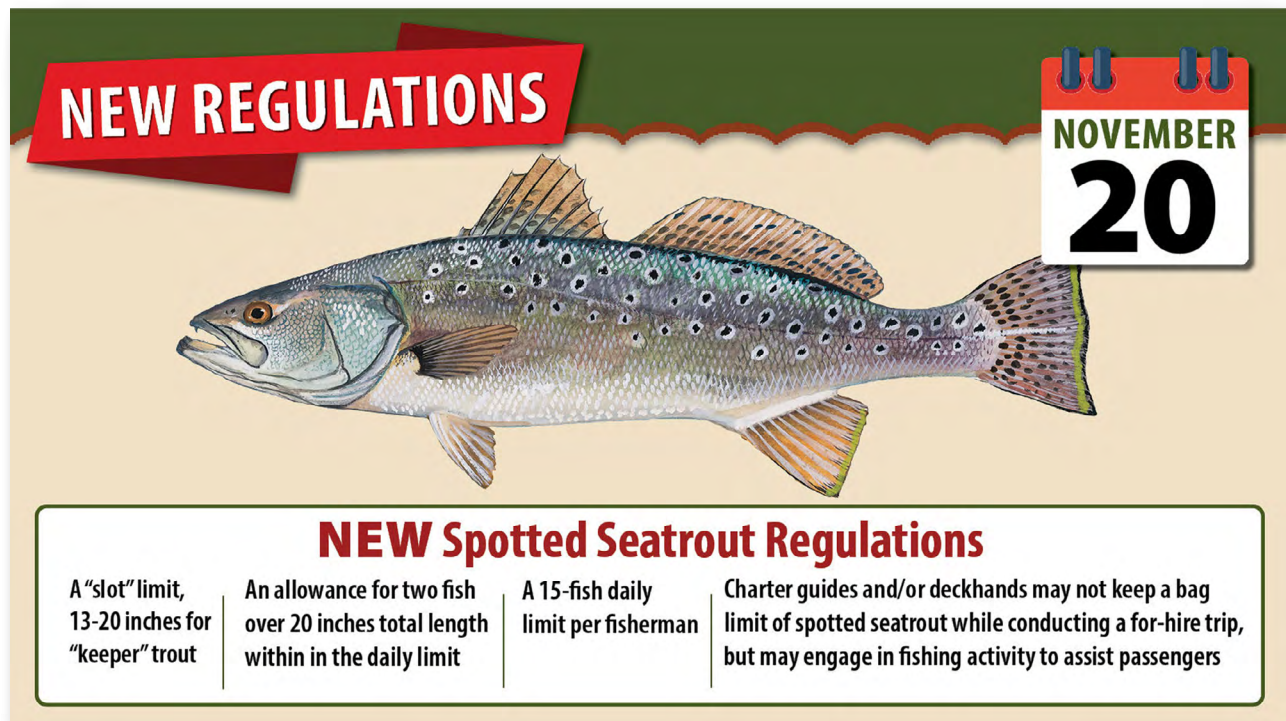
Further reading:

Gwinn, D.C., Allen, M.S., Johnston, F.D., Brown, P., Todd, C.R. and Arlinghaus, R. (2015), Rethinking length-based fisheries regulations: the value of protecting old and large fish with harvest slots. *Fish and Fisheries*, 16: 259-281.

Lowerre-Barbieri SK, Henderson N, Llopiz J, Walters S, Bickford J, Muller R (2009) Defining a spawning population (spotted seatrout, *Cynoscion nebulosus*) over temporal, spatial, and demographic scales. *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 394:231-245.

New Speckled Trout Regulations went into Effect Nov. 20, 2023

The new speckled trout size and daily creel limits went into effect Nov. 20, 2023.



NEW REGULATIONS

NOVEMBER 20

NEW Spotted Seatrout Regulations

A "slot" limit, 13-20 inches for "keeper" trout	An allowance for two fish over 20 inches total length within in the daily limit	A 15-fish daily limit per fisherman	Charter guides and/or deckhands may not keep a bag limit of spotted seatrout while conducting a for-hire trip, but may engage in fishing activity to assist passengers
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The new regulations are as follows:

Size Limit: 13-20 inches total length, only two fish included within the daily creel limit can be greater than 20 inches total length.

Daily Creel: 15-fish daily limit per angler.

Charterboat guides and crew will not be able to retain a creel limit while on a charter trip but may engage in fishing.

Commercial Large Coastal Sharks Possession Limit Will Increase to 55 Sharks When Season Opens Jan. 1, 2024

Officials with the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries announced the daily possession limit for commercially harvested large coastal sharks (great hammerhead, scalloped hammerhead, smooth hammerhead, nurse shark, blacktip shark, bull shark, lemon shark, sandbar shark, silky shark, spinner shark and tiger shark) is increasing from 45 to 55 per day when the 2024 season opens on Jan. 1. The adjustment was made by Secretary Robert Shadoin, as authorized by Wildlife and Fisheries Commission action in LAC 76.VII.357.H.2, after he was informed by NOAA Fisheries of a similar adjustment in the federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

There is still no possession of sandbar sharks allowed unless a commercial fisherman has in their name and in possession a valid federal shark research permit as described in federal regulations (50 CFR 635.32(1)).



NOAA Fisheries will withhold a Portion of the 2024 Gag Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) Allocation in Anticipation of a Quota Reduction

Key Messages:

- NOAA Fisheries will withhold distribution of gag IFQ commercial allocation on Jan. 1, 2024, in the amount necessary to implement the proposed gag rebuilding plan and the reductions in the gag commercial annual catch limit and annual catch target proposed in Amendment 56 to the Fishery Management Plan for Reef Fish Resources in the Gulf of Mexico.
- NOAA Fisheries has issued the proposed rule for Amendment 56; however, if Amendment 56 is approved, the rule would not be implemented until sometime in 2024, after the initial IFQ allocation is made to shareholders.

What This Means:

- This action will withhold the distribution of gag IFQ allocation on Jan. 1, 2024, in the amount equal to the proposed reduction in the allocation for shareholders in the Grouper- Tilefish IFQ quota program.
- This action would also set the red grouper multi-use allocation to zero, as required if gag is in a rebuilding plan.
- The current gag commercial annual catch limit set in a 2023 Interim Action is 258,000 pounds (lb) gutted weight and the annual catch target is 199,000 lb gutted weight. Amendment 56 would reduce these catch limits to 155,000 lb gutted weight and 147,000 lb gutted weight, respectively.
- If NOAA Fisheries does not issue a final rule for Amendment 56 that is effective by June 1, 2024, then the withheld allocation will be distributed back to the current shareholders, as determined on the date the withheld IFQ allocation is distributed.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Why is the Quota Reduction Occurring?

- A 2021 stock assessment of Gulf of Mexico gag (SEDAR 72) indicated there were too few fish (overfished) and that too many fish were being caught (overfishing taking place).
- In January 2022, NOAA Fisheries sent a letter to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council stating that gag were overfished, and that a plan to rebuild the gag stock needed to be developed and implemented within two years of the notification.
- Amendment 56 was developed to address overfishing and rebuild the Gulf of Mexico gag stock. An Interim Action was implemented in 2023 to reduce overfishing until Amendment 56 could be implemented (expected in early 2024).

Will I be Able to Comment on the Proposed Reduction in Harvest?

- Yes, the Amendment 56 Notice of Availability and Proposed Rule are currently open for public comment.
- Comments on both Amendment 56 and the proposed rule will be used in making a determination on the final rule.

Where Can I Find More Information on the Gag Interim Measures?

Contact NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office

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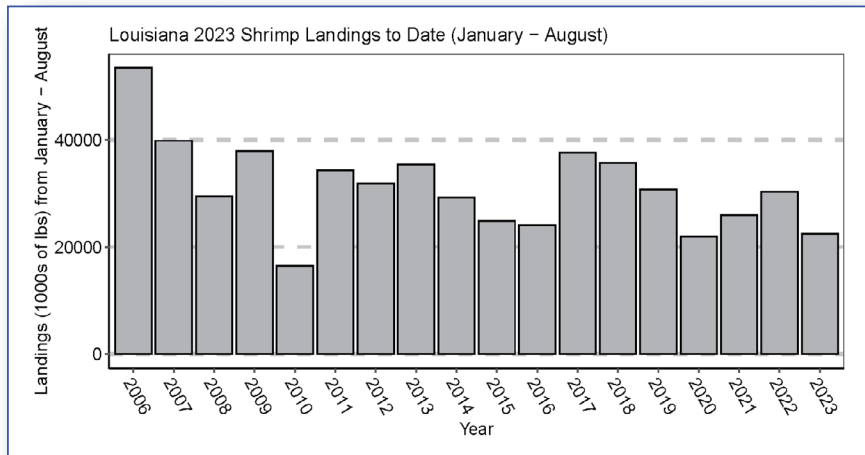
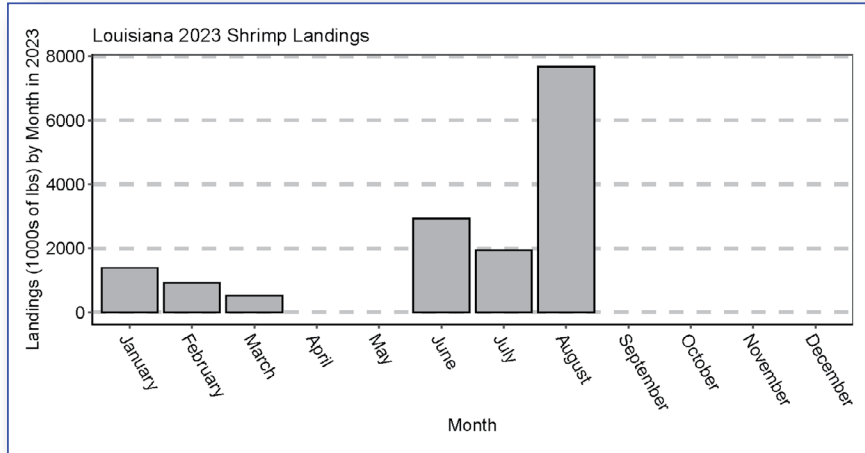
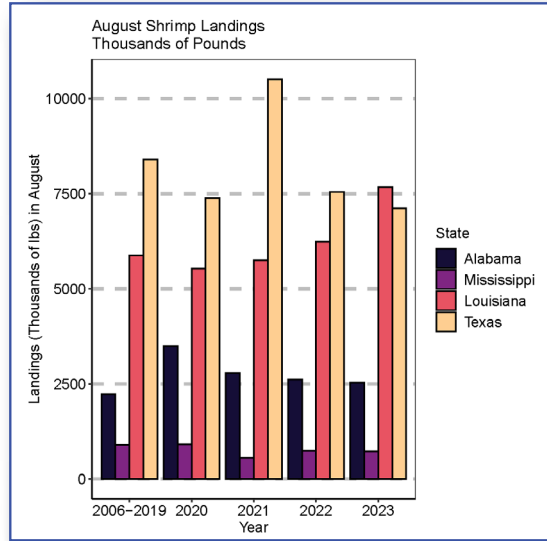
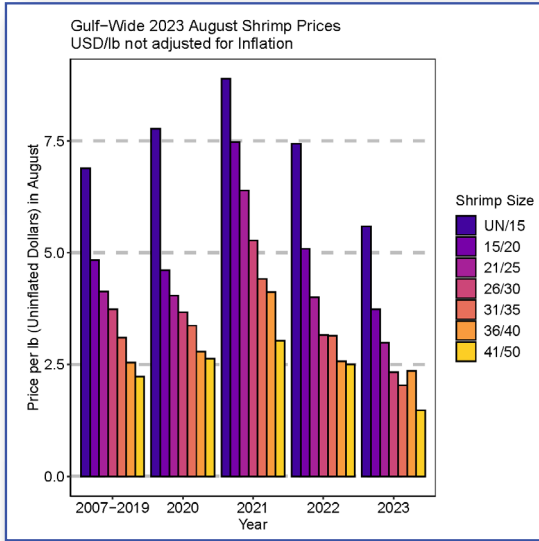
By Phone: (727) 824-5305



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Louisiana Shrimp Watch

The shrimp watch data for the December issue includes data through August. All landing data is based on trip ticket data provided by Gulf States and no estimations have been made.



THE GUMBO POT

Cajun Shrimp Spaghetti*

Recipe courtesy of Ms. Sarah's Country Kitchen

From Ms. Sarah: Hi Lagniappe readers!

I am excited to share some tasty recipes utilizing some of the best Louisiana seafood out there!
I would love suggestions, so please reach out to the editor on suggestions for recipes or critiques for improvement!



Ingredients:

- 2 lbs Gulf Shrimp, shelled and deveined
- 1 lb spaghetti, broken in half
- 1 lb Roma tomatoes
- 1 green bell pepper
- 1 red bell pepper
- ½ large white onion
- 3 celery stalks
- 1½ tbsp Cajun seasoning
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil

Directions:

1. Bring a large pot of water to boil and add extra virgin olive oil.
2. Chop peppers, celery, onion and tomatoes into large chunks and blend in a food processor until a chunky puree consistency forms.
3. Cook the broken spaghetti for 7 minutes or until al dente.
4. Add the tomato puree to a large pot and heat on med-high until boiling.
5. Add the Cajun seasoning to the puree and stir to mix.
6. Drain the cooked spaghetti and add to the tomato puree, mixing spaghetti in, cook for 5 minutes.
7. Add the shrimp to the mixture, stirring well to combine the shrimp.
8. Cover the pot and cook for 7 minutes or until the shrimp is pink and cooked through.
9. Enjoy!

Pair with garlic bread or add some sour cream to make it creamier.

**Total time: 45 minutes. Feeds 6-8 people.*



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We would like to hear from you! Please contact us regarding fishery questions, comments or concerns you would like to see covered in the Lagniappe. Anyone interested in submitting information, such as articles, editorials or photographs pertaining to fishing or fisheries management is encouraged to do so.

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Be sure to visit the *Lagniappe* blog for
additional news and timely events between issues.
<https://louisianalagniappe.wordpress.com/>

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