Proposal #: 20SER019-032

Project Title: Resolving Barriers to Sustainable Fishery Certification for the Gulf of Mexico Federal Otter Trawl Shrimp Fishery

Applicant: LGL Ecological Research Associates, Inc.

Priority Addressed Priority #1 – Promotion, Development and Marketing

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Abstract: The federally-permitted penaeid shrimp fishery of the Gulf of Mexico is one of the nation's most valuable fisheries. However, bycatch associated with shrimp trawls presents a serious challenge for meeting requirements for certification as a sustainable fishery. Without such certification, the shrimp industry is likely to lose market share to international competitors and may have difficulty selling their product to major seafood buyers (Walmart, Kroger, etc.). After decades of effort to reduce bycatch, two barriers for certification of the federal otter trawl fleet remain: low observer coverage and the "modified characterization protocol" of bycatch whereby a large percent is unidentified (https://tinyurl.com/SustainableShrimp). Work to resolve the first barrier is underway; the second is the basis of this proposal. Through this project we will work with industry and NMFS collaborators to (1) collect and fully characterize bycatch obtained by the NMFS observer sampling program and (2) quantify changes in bycatch composition for the period 1992 to 2021. A comprehensive bycatch database will be provided to NMFS and a full report of the results will be widely distributed to relevant stakeholders and the general public. This project will benefit the shrimping industry, the NMFS observer program, fisheries managers, and U.S. consumers.

Summary of potential commercial benefits to the fishing community of the research results: Given our ongoing dialog with sustainable fishery certification experts, we are confident that the proposed work will resolve the most difficult barrier to certification of the Gulf of Mexico federal otter trawl shrimp fishery. Our project involves producers, fish dealers and processors; government scientists and certification experts. Results will help the shrimp industry to meet the requirements of current major buyers, promote additional market demand from buyers requiring certification (e.g. from Europe, where there is a large demand for large shrimp with sustainability certifications), improve public perception, and thus contribute to the stability and viability of the shrimp fishery.