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**When Sourcing Your Seafood,
There's No Place Like Home**



A fleet of Mississippi-Alabama shrimp boats in the past (top) and today (bottom). Source: MSU Marine Fisheries Ecology Program

Gulf coast fisheries boast a multigenerational lineage that has shaped not only the economy of the region, but the culture. They have formed the backbone of coastal communities, with most residents participating in one or many components as fishermen, restaurant owners or employees, and consumers. However, recent decades have seen an expansion of foreign imports such as shrimp, leading to declining dockside prices for domestic products. As a result, a growing disconnect has formed between what is harvested locally and what is served locally, interrupting the dynamic between local fishermen, consumers, and restaurants. Unfortunately, many individuals are unaware of this disruption due to incorrectly labeled seafood, where products are marketed as local when they are actually imported. In fact, [recent genetic testing independently conducted by SeaD Consulting](#) found that the majority of Mississippi Gulf Coast

restaurants tested were not serving domestic shrimp as advertised. As a result, imported shrimp are outcompeting domestic shrimp in part due to mislabeling rather than fair competition. This suppresses demand for locally caught shrimp and undermines American fishermen following legal and sustainable U.S. fishing practices. Buying local seafood is about even more than just Gulf coast pride. Domestic seafood are caught more sustainably, support your local fishermen, processors, and markets, are healthier and free of prohibited antibiotics and chemicals.

Thankfully, this issue has received recent attention from state and federal politicians, who have introduced new policies aimed at stopping mislabeling and encouraging a thriving domestic fishing industry. This mission is resonating with community members, too. In this issue of the Gulf Coast Fishermen Newsletter, we will discuss these efforts on a federal, state, and community level.



A Mississippi fisherman holds a fresh Gulf shrimp catch. Source: MSU Marine Fisheries Ecology Program

From the White House to U.S. Coasts

On April 17, 2025 President Trump issued an [Executive Order on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness](#). This Executive Order builds on an order he signed in 2020 to promote seafood competitiveness and deconstruct unnecessary regulations. The order acknowledges that despite the rich ocean resources controlled by the United States, *nearly 90% of seafood for sale in America is imported*. Further, between 2019 and 2023, domestic landings decreased by approximately 1 billion pounds, even though many American fish stocks are not experiencing overfishing. As such, the White House has called for a collaborative interagency effort to “promote the productive harvest of our seafood resources; unburden our commercial fishermen from costly and inefficient regulation; combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing; and protect our seafood markets from the unfair trade practices of foreign nations.” In response, [NOAA fisheries has laid out a number of ongoing and future actions](#):

- Considering appropriate regulatory changes, especially for those fisheries with significant recent declines in landings and/or revenue
- Reviewing commercial fishing limitations in existing marine national monuments
- Assessing and potentially modifying advanced technology strategies to improve data collection
- Updating the Seafood Trade Strategy to reflect new global trade dynamics
- Developing a collaborative, interagency America First Seafood Strategy.

Additional efforts include improving the Seafood Import Monitoring Program to effectively target and intercept shipments sourced from nations that routinely violate international fishery regulations. American fishermen uphold the world’s strictest environmental, labor, and food safety regulations to provide a sustainable, local source of protein, meriting an equal opportunity for competition and a more dominant role in our fisheries market.

Check out a fact sheet regarding the recent Executive Order [here](#).



◀ PRESIDENTIAL ACTIONS

RESTORING AMERICAN SEAFOOD COMPETITIVENESS

Executive Orders | April 17, 2025

A screenshot from President Donald Trump's Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness Executive Order. Source: [whitehouse.gov](https://www.whitehouse.gov)

Labeling Laws: If you can read it, then you can choose it

Mississippi

In alignment with the mission of the President's Executive Order, state Representative Brent Anderson and Mississippi Department of Marine Resources Executive Director Joe Spraggins have advocated for stricter seafood labeling laws in Mississippi. Because of their efforts, the Mississippi Legislature passed a bill requiring all seafood and crawfish sold in Mississippi to be labeled as "imported" or "domestic" by July 1, 2025. Both the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources and Mississippi Department of Agriculture and Commerce oversee business compliance regarding the new law, conducting an inspection akin to those they already conduct under the Mississippi catfish labeling law. These labeling laws apply to any retailer of seafood, whether that be a grocery store or a food truck or market and require labels on any relevant display (e.g., any menu, packaging, or advertisement where seafood or crawfish are promoted). The label text must also be at least as large as the product name to ensure visibility. In the wake of the

aforementioned findings by SeaD Consulting, this new law will help to reestablish consumer trust by holding establishments accountable for their product sourcing and ultimately, enable informed decision-making to strengthen Mississippi's commercial fisheries. To learn more about the new state law, click [here](#).



June 10, 2025

Mississippi's Seafood Labeling Law to take effect July 1, 2025

A press release detailing Mississippi's new seafood labeling law. Source: Mississippi Department of Marine Resources

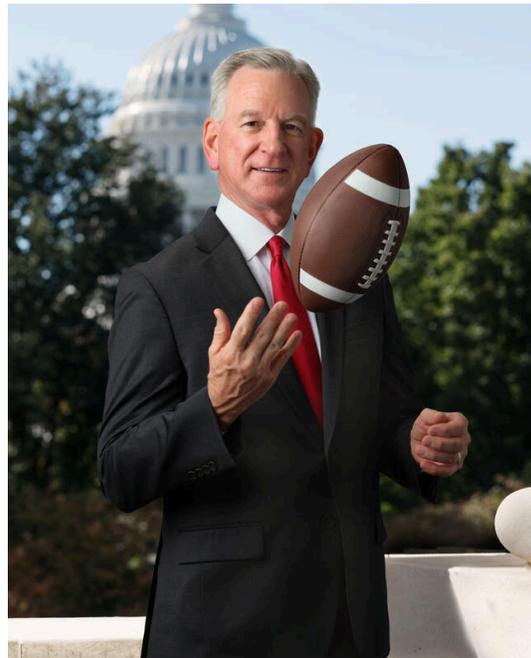
Federal

Drawing on Mississippi's new labeling laws, Gulf coast senators are elevating the issue to a federal level. In October, which is National Seafood Month, U.S. Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith (R-Miss.) and U.S. Senator Tommy Tuberville (R-Ala.) introduced the Let Americans Buy with Explicit Labeling (LABEL) Act ([S.3065](#)) to ensure all seafood is labeled clearly with its country of origin and method of production (e.g., wild-caught, farm raised). This law requires the country of origin and product information to be printed in a font size at least as large as the product name. Oftentimes, imported seafood labels are extremely small and branded in patriotic packaging, making it easy for customers to overlook or be misled about the source of their seafood. If packages are labeled clearly, consumers can make an informed decision regarding the source of their seafood, as well as drive fair price premiums for domestic high-quality seafood products. When it comes to promoting the quality of Mississippi and Alabama's seafood, Senator Hyde-Smith and Senator Tuberville agree.

Senator Hyde-Smith: *"Mississippi's seafood industry is already battling a flood of cheap imports, much of which don't meet the same safety standards our domestic producers uphold. This bill would ensure American consumers know*

exactly where their seafood comes from, while giving our domestic fishermen and producers a fair chance to compete.”

Senator Tuberville: “American producers have been undercut by foreign producers dumping their low-quality seafood into our markets. There’s no better source for fish and seafood than Alabama ponds and the Gulf of America, and we want people to know where their food is coming from. I’m proud to join Senator Hyde-Smith in this legislation that bolsters American seafood production, promotes safe seafood consumption, and protects our domestic producers.”



Senator Cindy Hyde-Smith (left) and Senator Tommy Tuberville introduced the LABEL Act to the U.S. Senate. Source: hydesmith.senate.gov and <https://www.tuberville.senate.gov/about/> resp.

Change at the Grassroots Level

Conservation Cuts

While these new policies are promising, community support is essential in ensuring domestic fisheries get the credit they deserve. Indeed, members of the Gulf community are stepping up to the plate to support their local fishermen. For example, Executive Chef Michael Nelson of the highly reputable GW Fins in New Orleans is making waves with his culinary creativity. Bringing in fresh, local catches, sometimes caught the morning of the same day they will be prepared, he designs his menu to emphasize resourcefulness and sustainability by [“directly supporting and sustaining the efforts and livelihoods of the people who \[he\] feels are using responsible practices in the raising and harvesting of their products.”](#) As such, GW Fins is only serving seafood that satisfies the standards set by The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. On his menu are multiple options labeled as “Ocean Conservation Cuts,” which is a practice Chef Michael developed that emphasizes sustainability through high-quality local sourcing and innovative culinary approach. For these plates, he utilizes all parts of the fish, even those that would have otherwise been discarded. When purchasing whole fish, Chef Michael Nelson uses dry aging to preserve the parts that are not served immediately, allowing them to develop a delicious flavor profile with time. By purposing these underutilized cuts, “Ocean Conservation Cuts” reduce waste and maximize value of each fish per landing. In 2023, GW Fins hosted an Ocean Conservation Cuts private five-course dinner, which served delicious and inventive meals to showcase every part of a fish, including Fin Wings and fish bellies. By demonstrating the wide-ranging capacities and value of these high-quality fish, Chef Michael not only feeds, but educates his customers.



Chef Michael Nelson butchers a fish. Source: *GW Fins* through [New Orleans Magazine](#)

Patriotic Prawns

Fighting back against the mislabeling that has occurred in the northern Gulf, Bethany Fayard of Ocean Springs Seafood Inc. developed her own means of consumer transparency. Last year, she introduced a program called “Patriotic Prawns.” Through this program, restaurants that serve exclusively domestic shrimp and pass an inspection receive a Patriotic Prawns sticker to display. This sticker clearly lets consumers know from where their dinner came. As seafood suppliers themselves, Ocean Springs Seafood Inc. provides local catches to many Gulf restaurants. There’s no catch when it comes to their program though: a restaurant doesn’t have to be an Ocean Springs Seafood Inc. customer to get certified. When customers see a Patriotic Prawns sticker in a restaurant window, they can rest easy knowing they are receiving local, high-quality shrimp. They showcase domestic pride, increase transparency, and enable consumers to make informed choices.



A Patriotic Prawns sticker is proudly displayed at Martha’s Tea Room in Ocean Springs, Mississippi. Photo by Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant Consortium

Gulf coast fishermen harvest seafood under world-leading sustainability, labor, and health standards. When you buy local, you are supporting your local fishermen, seafood processors, and fish markets, as well as investing directly in

your community. Spread the word and make sure you are choosing local! To learn more about the benefits of selecting local versus imported seafood, check out our short video [here](#).



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