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DEPARTMENT OF
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Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission
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Recently the population explosion of lionfish in the Gulf and South Atlantic has become a major issue of concern. My research of artificial reefs off the Alabama Coast has revealed a startling increase of these fish in just the last three years. While no one can be exactly sure of the eventual ecosystem impacts of this invasive species, they are certainly going to be negative, and potentially catastrophic to our native populations of co-inhabiting reef species.

I know there are numerous efforts to try and curb their continued population expansion. While few of these have shown marked success, to date exploitation by spearfishing seems to be yielding the best results. Recently you have been contacted by Ms. Candy Hansard regarding a rewards system for spear fishermen who harvest lionfish. I am in full support of this plan, and urge the Commission to actively consider adopting it or some similar version. Ms. Hansard has been extremely active in addressing the problem and is especially knowledgeable of the efforts and successes by spear fishermen along the north central Gulf Coast. Her program would utilize a minimal number of tags for harvest of reef fish, while providing motivation for removal of thousands of lionfish.

Eventually, one hopes that development of a commercial market along with plans similar to that of Ms. Hansard will at least curb the increase of this species.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert L. Shipp, Ph.D." followed by a stylized initial "RS".

Robert L. Shipp, Ph.D

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Member and three times chair, Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council