

BEFORE THE MISSISSIPPI ETHICS COMMISSION

SARAH JANE BEAUGEZ

COMPLAINANT

VS.

PUBLIC RECORDS CASE NO. R-25-005

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF MARINE RESOURCES

RESPONDENT

FINAL ORDER

This matter came before the Mississippi Ethics Commission through a Public Records Complaint filed by Sarah Jane Beaugez against the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources (“MDMR”). MDMR filed a response by and through its attorney. The Ethics Commission has jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to Section 25-61-13, Miss. Code of 1972. A Preliminary Report and Recommendation of the hearing officer was approved by the Ethics Commission on October 3, 2025, in accordance with Rule 5.6, Rules of the Mississippi Ethics Commission.

On October 24, 2025, MDMR filed an Objection to the Preliminary Report and Recommendation, affirmatively stating it is not requesting a hearing in this matter. The respondent’s objection waives the respondent’s right to a hearing on the merits. Accordingly, a Final Report and Recommendation of the Hearing Officer was presented to the Commission at its regular meeting on January 9, 2026, at which time the Commission approved this Final Order in accordance with Rule 5.6, Rules of the Mississippi Ethics Commission.

I. FINDINGS OF FACT

1.1 Sarah Jane Beaugez alleges the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources violated the Public Records Act by failing to timely respond to her public records requests and by failing to explain why responsive documents were not provided. She states, “although I received documents, not one document is what I requested.”

1.2 On Sunday, January 19, 2025, Ms. Beaugez submitted a public records request for:

1. Funds going into the “Seafood Fund”; allocation of those funds; where they were spent – to include all funds under the umbrella of the seafood fund: Artificial Reef Program Account, Coastal Preserve Account, MS Seafood Marketing Program Account, Oyster Production Preserve Account; Private fund sources & amounts
2. Oyster reef(s) lease(s), lessees, cost.

1.3 On January 23, 2025, the complainant followed up on her request, stating “I need these records no later than Wednesday, January 29th please and thank you!” The same day, MDMR requested the complainant clarify her request. MDMR states its “finance staff advised ...that Ms. Beaugez’s request as written would produce an extremely large number of documents and asked if Ms. Matta [Executive Assistant for MDMR] could request a date range from Ms. Beaugez, so the search could be targeted and capture the information she desired without Ms. Beaugez

incurring unnecessary fees.” MDMR asked Ms. Beaugez to “provide a date range that you are wanting to see so our finance department can narrow your search to what you are wanting.”

1.4 Ms. Beaugez replied:

My understanding is that the “Seafood Account” and all the accounts mentioned under its umbrella didn’t exist until SB 2544 was signed by Governor Reeves in May 2023. I’d like all of the records from the inception of those accounts through the present. And I’d like all of the information pertaining to “State-Owned Leases” as provided for in SD 2544 (2023) from May 2023 through the present.

1.5 MDMR states: “Based on Ms. Beaugez’s response, it was obvious to MDMR staff at this point that Ms. Beaugez was mistaken about the inception of the Seafood Fund and the funds she mentioned that fall under the umbrella of the Seafood Fund.” MDMR explained in their response to the complaint that:

The Seafood Fund was created effective July 1, 1994, when the MDMR was established as a separate agency. *See 1994 Miss. Laws Ch. 578 (S.B. 3079)*. The Artificial Reef Program Account was created effective April 21, 1999. *See 1999 Miss. Laws Ch. 558 (S.B. 2756)*. The Coastal Preserve Account was created effective July 1, 2000. *See 2000 Miss. Laws Ch. 536 (H.B. 280)*. The Mississippi Seafood Marketing Program Account was established effective April 26, 2011. *See 2011 Miss. Laws Ch. 523 (H.B. 104)*. The Oyster Production Preserve Account is the only account newly established in 2023 pursuant to S.B. 2544. *See 2023 Miss. Laws Ch. 496 (S.B. 2544)*.

1.6 On Friday, January 24, 2025, MDMR sent another email to Ms. Beaugez advising her that the Seafood Fund was created in 1994 and that obtaining the account information “from the inception of those accounts through the present” would produce an extremely large number of documents and incur extensive fees for the reproduction of same. The same day, Ms. Beaugez clarified that she wanted “the records for the Seafood Fund and all accounts under that umbrella named in her PRR, from May 2023 through the present.”

1.7 On Tuesday, January 28, 2025, Ms. Beaugez followed up on the status of her request. The same day, MDMR notified her in writing that “the process takes 5-7 business days.” On Friday, January 31, 2025, Ms. Beaugez followed up on the status of her request again.

1.8 MDMR replied on February 3, 2025, the sixth working day after receiving Ms. Beaugez’s clarified request, stating “I am waiting on some additional records from another office but I will have a quote for you today.” Several hours later, MDMR provided a cost estimate of \$100.00 to provide responsive records. The complainant balked at the cost, replying “I am a bit confused. My understanding was if I did not request paper copies that I would not need to pay for the records.”

1.9 The next day, February 4, 2025, MDMR explained that the cost to search for and review the responsive records would exceed the \$100.00 estimate, “but we are not going to charge you for any additional.” The complainant paid the estimate and was provided a link with all responsive documents that afternoon. In support of its response, MDMR provided the Ethics

Commission access to the documents provided to Ms. Beaugez. The documents included: copies of 21 leases for oyster production (with the address of the lessees redacted); reports for Expenses from May 1, 2023 through January 27, 2025 for the Artificial Reef Preserve Account, the Coastal Preserve Account and the MS Seafood Marketing Program Account; a report for Revenues from May 1, 2023 through January 27, 2025 for the Coastal Preserve Account and Oyster Production Preserve Account; a map of oyster leases; and a spreadsheet reflecting the annual rent paid by certain named lessees.

1.10 Dissatisfied with the records provided, the complainant followed up asking why addresses of the lessees were redacted on the leases and with a series of questions for information.¹ In a response email the same day, MDMR stated, “The information that is redacted on the leases in personal addresses.” On February 5, 2025 she had a phone conversation with MDMR Executive Director Joe Spraggins. Believing that he better understood what Ms. Beaugez was requesting, he advised her that he would have staff prepare reports that included all accounts under the Seafood Fund in a manner that was more understandable, and Ms. Beaugez agreed to allow three additional working days for MDMR to provide responsive documents.

1.11 In its response, MDMR explains:

On Thursday, February 6, 2025, Director Spraggins met with staff and advised that he wanted the information for Ms. Beaugez’s records request to include all accounts under the Seafood Fund, not just those listed in Ms. Beaugez’s Public Records Request. He also directed that the reports be compiled in an understandable format. Staff explained to Director that they had provided the reports in the only format the system was capable of providing and that they did not have the ability to change the format to make it more understandable unless it is done manually. Director Spraggins advised staff to prepare the reports manually and to provide it to Ms. Beaugez no later than Friday, February 7th so that she would have the weekend to review the reports before they were to meet on Monday, February 10th.

On Friday, February 7, 2025, at 2:15 p.m., Ms. Matta emailed the information that had been manually prepared by the Finance Staff to Ms. Beaugez. The manual processing of these records took the MDMR Accounting Supervisor two business days to complete, and no additional fees were charged for the additional work performed, even though the Public Records Act does not require an agency to manually create reports.

...

On Wednesday, February 12, 2025, at 10:41 a.m., Ms. Beaugez emailed Director Spraggins a letter dated February 11, 2025, advising that she was disappointed in the PRR fulfillment that she received. She advised that she had requested a list of

¹ Questions included, for example:

1. Why are you paying salaries with state benefits out of this account?
2. Why are you paying water, electric, and gas bills for reef restoration?
3. Why is this spreadsheet so disorganized?

...

2024-2025 lease applicants via text to the Director and that the MDMR has not produced the leases, or names of people who have applied for leases, and have only sent her pieces of information on the Seafood Account and the four accounts under its umbrella as she has repeatedly requested. Therefore, instead of attending the meeting and requesting clarification and/or additional documents that she felt were missing, Ms. Beaugez advised that she is not comfortable meeting with Director and his staff....

1.12 The complainant also filed a “rebuttal” to MDMR’s response, providing some additional correspondence regarding her public records request. In the rebuttal she states that the documents produced by MDMR do not satisfy her request, and that “I don’t want documents generated by staff in ‘easy-to-understand’ format. I want the documents themselves.” She also argues that there is no basis to redact the lessee’s addresses from the leases provided. Finally, she shows that that she texted Executive Director Spraggins with a request for lease applications.

1.13 In support of its response, MDMR included a copy of its public records policy. This policy states, in pertinent part:

2. A request for information or access to the MDMR public records should be submitted on the form attached as P&P Form 10-2 whenever possible. However, if the form cannot be utilized, the request must be marked “Request for Public Records.” All requests must describe in reasonable detail the public records sought, including a description of the type of records, names, dates, file numbers, title of publication; and any other information which may aid in locating the requested public records.

...

9. The cost of production by the MDMR will be calculated after a request for information has been submitted. Fees shall be collected prior to compliance with the request or other payment otherwise guaranteed. ...

1.14 In its objection to the Preliminary Report and Recommendation, DMR “disputes the proposed finding that the MDMR violated Section 25-61-5 of the Public Records Act by redacting information (home addresses of lessees) without providing a written statement of the specific exemptions relied upon for the redaction.” MDMR goes on to state:

The MDMR admits that no statement of the specific exemptions relied upon for the redaction of lessor’s addresses was provided at the time that the leases were released to Ms. Beaugez.

However, for the Commission to find that the MDMR violated Section 25-61-5 based upon this omission is premature in that there was no follow-up request from Ms. Beaugez for those addresses and no showing that those addresses were of legitimate concern to the public. As stated in the Mississippi Ethics Commission, *In re Gray Media Group, Inc. D/B/A WLBT-TV vs. Jackson Municipal Airport Authority*, Final Order; R-22-041, Public Records Case No. R-22-041 (2023), which was cited as authority for the proposed finding, “...**public bodies should**

always exercise extreme caution when asked to release public records which contain private information such as home addresses, and may initially redact private information that does not appear to be of legitimate concern to the public. The release of private information in response to a public records request could subject a public body to liability for the intentional tort of invasion of privacy, as discussed in *Taylor-Travis v. Jackson State Univ.*, 984 F.3 1107 (2021) (emphasis added).

Ms. Beaugez emailed the MDMR asking why anything was redacted from the copies of the leases provided to her. The MDMR advised her that only the private home addresses were redacted. There was no follow-up request from Ms. Beaugez requesting those addresses and no showing from her that the addresses would be of legitimate concern to the public. This case is distinguishable from the WLBT case in that there was no showing that the lease holders' addresses were needed for any public matter. Had Ms. Beaugez made a follow-up request for the addresses and then MDMR further denied providing those addresses without providing a specific exemption, the MDMR would agree with the proposed finding. However, without that taking place, the proposed finding is premature.

Furthermore, MDMR does not agree with the statement "[I]t is unlikely that those addresses are exempt." There are authorities which state that unless there is a legitimate reason for release or a statute that requires or authorizes the release of personal information, it should not be made public.

... [MDMR cites the Attorney General's Office opinion in *Turner*, 2015 WL 1744886 (Miss.A.G.), where it stated that address and other related personal information are should not be made public pursuant to a public records request.] ...

In this case, there was no follow-up request for the personal addresses of the lease holders after Ms. Beaugez was informed that the only information redacted was in fact the personal addresses. Had Ms. Beaugez followed through with a request for the addresses, the MDMR would have provided the above-referenced authorities and requested further information regarding the legitimate concern for obtaining such personal information. However, there was no follow-up request and no showing that the personal addresses of the lease holders were a legitimate public concern.

II. CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

2.1 The Mississippi Public Records Act of 1983 (the "Act"), codified at Section 25-61-1, et seq., Miss. Code of 1972, provides that public records shall be available for inspection or copying by any person unless a statute or court decision "specifically declares" a public record to be confidential, privileged, or exempt. Sections 25-61-2 and 25-61-11.

2.2 Section 25-61-5(1)(a) mandates that "[n]o public body shall adopt procedures which will authorize the public body to produce or deny production of a public record later than seven (7) working days from the date of the receipt of the request for the production of the record."

Section 25-61-5(1)(b) allows up to fourteen working days for production of public records when the public body provides a specific, written explanation why the records cannot be produced within seven days. Section 25-61-5(1)(b) allows production of public records beyond fourteen (14) working days from the receipt by the public body of the original request upon “mutual agreement of the parties.” The Public Records Act is clear that a public body has a duty to either provide records or a written denial after receiving a valid public records request.

2.3 Both requestors and public bodies have an obligation to communicate in good faith. Comment 4.3(3), Mississippi Model Public Records Rules. “[W]hen a public body receives a large or unclear request, the public body should communicate with the requestor to clarify the request.” Id. In this case, MDMR properly requested clarification from the requestor.

2.4 Furthermore, MDMR did not violate the Public Records Act by providing an estimate on February 3, 2025, nine (9) working days after Ms. Beaugez’s initial public records request, submitted on January 19, 2025², since MDMR timely requested clarification of her request on January 23, 2025 – two (2) working days after she made her initial request. Ms. Beaugez submitted a clarified request on January 24, 2025, and MDMR notified her in writing on January 28, 2025 – two (2) working days after she submitted her clarified request – that it would take 5-7 business days to process her request. Accordingly, MDMR had seven (7) working days from the date Ms. Beaugez clarified her request to respond, which it did by providing a cost estimate on February 3, 2025 – six (6) working days after receiving Ms. Beaugez’s clarified request. MDMR could have taken up to fourteen (14) working days from the date of receiving Ms. Beaugez’s clarified request had they notified her in writing that they needed additional time to complete her request. Indeed, Comment 4.3(7) to the Mississippi Model Public Records Rules states:

... A public body may take additional time to provide the records or deny the request if it is awaiting a clarification. ... A clarification could also affect a reasonable estimate of time to comply with a request.

2.5 Ms. Beaugez also alleges MDMR violated the Public Records Act by providing documents which were not responsive to her request. Upon review of Ms. Beaugez’s request and the documents provided by MDMR, it appears that the documents are responsive to her request for “funds” and “leases”. In her original request, she did not specify that she wanted underlying documents, i.e., receipts for each transaction noted in each spreadsheet. When she clarified her request on January 24, 2025, she did state that she wanted “records”, but the clarification MDMR sought was for dates, so that the clarification for “records” was understandably overlooked. Should the complainant still seek the underlying records, if any exist, she may file a new public records request for those records.

2.6 The communications which occurred between Ms. Beaugez and MDMR reflect a failure by Ms. Beaugez to clearly and effectively communicate. While not in bad faith, when a requestor submits a broad public records request for records spanning multiple years and multiple topics, there should be some understanding on the part of the requestor that the public body may struggle to fully grasp the breath and complexity of the request and struggle to comply with the

² Since the day Ms. Beaugez submitted her public records request was a Sunday and the next day was a state holiday, for calculating working days under the Public Records Request, MDMR can deem her request received on Tuesday, January 21, 2025.

time limitations imposed by the Act due to staffing issues. Additionally, with these broad public records requests where multiple departments of a public body will be involved in responding to a public records request, requestors should be willing to mutually agree to allow a public body a reasonable amount of additional time to respond, beyond the statutorily allowed fourteen (14) working day period. This would assist public bodies to fully respond with fewer errors and mistakes.

2.7 “Requestors should keep in mind that all agencies have essential functions in addition to providing public records. Agencies also have greatly differing resources. Public records procedures should prevent excessive interference with the other essential functions of the public body. Therefore, while providing public records is a duty of a public body, it is not required to abandon its other, non-public records functions. The proper level of staffing for public records requests will vary among agencies, considering the complexity and number of requests to that public body, public body resources, and the public body's other functions.” Comment 4.1, Mississippi Model Public Records Rules.

2.8 It should be noted, however, that Ms. Beaugez’s request for underlying records may not be a request for identifiable records or for public records that exist. With electronic transactions, there may not be printable or paper documentation that the requestor seeks. The Commission has previously explained that a requestor must ask for an identifiable record or class of records. An “identifiable record” is one that staff of the public body can reasonably locate. An “identifiable record” is not a request for “information,” like the questions she posed to MDMR after receiving the initial response. Public records requests are not interrogatories. Public bodies are not obligated to answer questions or requests for information.

2.9 Additionally, the Public Records Act does not obligate public servants to perform research, and public bodies are never required to compile lists or create records that do not already exist to satisfy a public records request. Scruggs v. Caldwell, 970 So. 2d 1298, 1299 (Miss. App. 2007). If MDMR did not have records in the format they were requested and could not convert existing electronic records to that format, then the request should have been denied.

2.10 Public employees also should not begin searching for records until the requestor has described the requested records with enough specificity that the public employees know with certainty what to look for. The Public Records Act also mandates that public bodies collect fees in advance of complying with public records requests. The establishment of fees by a public body to reimburse it for searching, reviewing, redacting, duplicating and mailing public records is explicitly authorized by the Act. A public body “may establish and collect fees reasonably calculated to reimburse it for, and in no case to exceed, the actual cost of searching, reviewing and/or duplicating and, if applicable, mailing copies of public records.” Section 25-61-7(1). Public bodies are also “entitled to charge a reasonable fee for the redaction of any exempted material, not to exceed the agency's actual cost.” Section 25-61-5(2). “Any staff time or contractual services included in actual cost shall be at the pay scale of the lowest level employee or contractor competent to respond to the request.” Section 25-61-7(1). A public body must collect fees “in advance of complying with the request.” *Id.* This pre-payment, when based upon a reasonable estimate of the actual cost, is a deposit. See Comment 8.4(1), Mississippi Model Public Records Rules.

2.11 “[A] public body should provide a reasonable estimate of the time and costs it will take to fully respond to the request.... To provide a ‘reasonable’ estimate, a public body should not use the same estimate for every request. A public body should roughly calculate the time it will take to respond to the request and send estimates of varying lengths, as appropriate. There is no standard amount of time for fulfilling a request so reasonable estimates should vary.” Comment 4.3(6), Mississippi Model Public Records Rules.

2.12 Upon receipt of the fee estimate, a requestor can ameliorate any delay in a public body’s response by promptly paying the fee. The Ethics Commission has noted that upon being presented with a reasonable estimate of actual costs, requestors sometimes change the scope of their request or decide to withdraw a request for public records. Processing requests prior to receiving a deposit can result in a public body incurring unnecessary costs which requestors do not intend to pay. See Anderson v. Jackson State University, Public Records Case No. R-16-020.

2.13 A public body has no obligation to provide records to a requestor who refuses to pay a reasonable estimate of actual costs. The \$100.00 fee estimate provided to the complainant appears to be extremely low and does not appear to reflect the actual cost of searching and reviewing responsive records that was conducted by MDMR. Individuals who seek to extract voluminous records or complicated searches should expect to pay the actual costs incurred in responding to such requests. Upon paying the deposit, if the actual time and cost to process the public records request is less than what was estimated, public bodies are required to refund that excess portion of the deposit. However, if the actual costs exceed the estimate, public bodies may seek an additional deposit. Requestors should consider limiting the scope of their request to exemplars before filing a request for voluminous records or complicated searches, in order to determine whether the documents they are requesting are worth the cost, and to save a public body the unrecouped expense of abandoned searches. Requestors should also consider limiting the breadth of their requests to one class of documents per request, so that the public body clearly understands what is being requested, instead of, as shown in this case, nine separate categories containing multiple classes of responsive documents, ultimately causing unnecessary confusion for both the public body and requestor.

2.14 The complainant’s request for lease applications, which she texted the Executive Director also does not constitute a valid public records request. A public body must be given reasonable notice that a requestor is making a request for public records. “A requestor must give a public body reasonable notice that the request is being made pursuant to the act. Requestors are encouraged to cite or name the act but are not required to do so. A request using the terms “public records,” “public disclosure,” “FOIA,” or “Freedom of Information Act” (the terms commonly used for federal records requests) should provide a public body with reasonable notice in most cases.” Comment 4.2(1), Mississippi Model Public Records Rules. Additionally, as MDMR has adopted written policies under the Public Records Act, requestors should be expected to make additional requests formally, utilizing the public body’s prescribed form and rules. Comment 3.6, Mississippi Model Public Records Rules. Should the complainant still seek lease applications from MDMR, she may submit a new public records request. The agency director’s intervention was unhelpful and increased the confusion involved in this request.

2.15 Finally, the complainant states that MDMR did not explain why the lessors’ addresses in the lease documents were redacted in violation of the Act. When it delivered the leases

to the complainant, MDMR did not explain in writing that anything was redacted nor the reasons for such redactions. Ms. Beaugez emailed MDMR after receiving responsive documents, and MDMR simply replied, “[t]he information that is redacted on the leases is personal addresses.”

2.16 Redacting public records constitutes a partial denial of a public records request. Denials “shall be in writing and shall contain a statement of the specific reasons for the denial.” Section 25-61-5(3). MDMR violated the Public Records Act when it failed to provide a statement of the specific exemptions relied upon for the redaction of lessors’ addresses when it delivered the responsive documents.

2.17 Moreover, it is unlikely that these addresses are exempt. See Public Records Case No. R-14-022, Garrett vs. Miss. Board of Nursing; Public Records Case No. R-22-041, Gray Media Group, Inc. d/b/a WLBT-TV vs. Jackson Municipal Airport Authority; Roberts v. Mississippi Republican Party State Executive Committee, 465 So.2d 1050 (Miss. 1985); and Mississippi Dept. of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks v. Mississippi Wildlife Enforcement Officers' Ass'n, Inc., 740 So.2d 925 (Miss. 1999). While the Ethics Commission has warned public bodies to “exercise extreme caution when asked to release public records which contain private information” to avoid subjecting a public body to liability for the intentional tort of invasion of privacy, as discussed in Taylor-Travis v. Jackson State Univ., 984 F.3 1107 (2021), this warning is not a broad holding that personal addresses are exempt from the Public Records Act.

2.18 In its objection, MDMR points to a general statement in Mississippi Attorney General’s Opinion No. 2015-00065 to Turner (March 25, 2015):

It remains our opinion that generally, and unless authorized or required by statute, information such as addresses, telephone numbers, and other related personal information including dates of birth, social security numbers, and driver's license numbers should not be made public pursuant to a public records request. MS AG Ops., *Neyman* (January 31, 2014); *Smith* (July 2, 1984); *Stanton* (November 7, 2014)....

2.19 However, in the Turner opinion, the Mississippi Attorney General’s Office specifically opined that: “With regard to candidate qualifying forms, we are of the opinion that information which is necessary to verify or evaluate the candidate’s qualifications, such as a street address (residential address) or date of birth, is not subject to redaction.”

2.20 When adjudicating public records complaints, the Ethics Commission’s authority is limited to enforcing the provisions of the Act. Exemptions to the Mississippi Public Records Act must be specific and narrowly construed. Harrison County Development Commission v. Kinney, 920 So.2d 497, 502 (Miss. App. 2006). A court or a statute must have specifically declared a record or portion of a record exempt from disclosure. Section 25-61-11. An exemption should not be inferred. A public body cannot broaden or otherwise define the scope of a statutory exemption through rule making or policy or rely on an opinion that was not issued to it.

2.21 In this case, there is no “constitutional law, state or federal statutory law, or decision of a court of this state or the United States” that specifically declares addresses of oyster reef leaseholders confidential, privileged or exempt from the Mississippi Public Records Act. In

contrast, there are some Mississippi statutes that protect the addresses of certain classes of individuals from disclosure, including but not limited to: (1) Section 25-61-12 – home addresses of any law enforcement officer, criminal investigator, judge or district attorney (and their spouses or children); (2) Section 99-47-1 – addresses of victims of domestic violence enrolled in the Address Confidentiality Program; (3) Section 25-61-11.1 – home addresses of any person possessing a weapon permit issued under Section 45-9-101 or Section 97-37-7; (4) Section 19-5-319(3) – addresses of callers or persons the subject of emergency calls; (5) Section 25-62-3 – personal information of members, supporters, volunteers or donors of 501(c) entities; and (6) Section 25-11-119(3) – individual member's address and account information held by PERS. However, names and addresses held by public bodies are generally not exempt from the Mississippi Public Records Act. See, Public Records Case No. R-22-041, Gray Media Group, Inc. v. Jackson Municipal Airport Authority (airport commissioner's addresses are subject to disclosure); Roberts v. Mississippi Republican Party State Executive Committee, 465 So.2d 1050 (Miss. 1985) (complete drivers license records including names and address of all Mississippi license holders are public records); and Miss. Dept. of Wildlife (names and addresses of public employees are subject to public disclosure). Accordingly, redacting the addresses of oyster reef leaseholders was improper.

III. CONCLUSION

WHEREFORE, it is hereby ordered as follows:

3.1 The Ethics Commission acknowledges that the Department of Marine Resources acted in good faith to respond to the request; however, the Ethics Commission finds that the Department of Marine Resources violated Section 25-61-5 of the Public Records Act by redacting information without providing a written statement of the specific exemptions relied upon for the redaction.

3.2 The Ethics Commission orders the Mississippi Department of Marine Resources, through its officials and employees, to strictly comply with the Public Records Act, and find that further violations may result in the imposition of penalties, including payment of reasonable costs incurred by the person seeking public records.

SO ORDERED, this the 12th day of January 2026.

SONIA SHURDEN, Hearing Officer
Mississippi Ethics Commission