



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Flawed Decision made on Red Snapper Reallocation

(Galveston, TX): Despite overwhelming public opposition and numerous fatal legal flaws, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has approved a measure that permanently strips commercial fishermen and seafood consumers of over a third of a million pounds of red snapper from the Gulf of Mexico every year.

We're disappointed that NMFS buckled under the political pressure from the Coastal "Conservation" Association (CCA). Amendment 28 has numerous defects that NMFS blatantly ignored, including that it wrongly rewards the recreational sector with a higher quota based on that sector's prior overharvesting, will exacerbate stock depletion in half the Gulf of Mexico, and imposes unfair economic harms on the commercial sector without solving any of the problems in the recreational fishery. This is why fishermen and the public have consistently opposed this plan for years. NMFS once again made the wrong decision and it's putting our businesses and the recovery of red snapper at risk.

Captain Buddy Guindon

Owner and operator, f/v Hull Raiser, Galveston, Texas

Executive Director, Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance

The controversial measure, known as Amendment 28, reallocates annually over 350,000 pounds of commercial red snapper quota to the recreational sector, effectively rewarding that sector for exceeding its scientifically-based catch limit in 21 of the last 24 years. The commercial sector, by contrast, has consistently adhered to its catch limits. The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council voted for this reallocation at a hotly contested meeting last year over tremendous opposition by the people that this measure would directly harm.

Commercial fishermen opposed this. Charter fishermen opposed this. Environmental organizations opposed this. Fish houses opposed this. Chefs and restaurateurs opposed this. Seafood consumers opposed this. Scientists opposed this. Even individual recreational anglers opposed this. So who actually supported this? The CCA and state fisheries bureaucrats – the same ones that want to eliminate the commercial red snapper fishery altogether.

Captain Glen Brooks

President, Gulf Fishermen's Association, Lecanto, Florida

Fishermen and seafood consumers alike raised legitimate concerns with the impacts of such a decision on their ability to continue to sustainably access this public resource.

Up to 97% of Americans access Gulf red snapper as consumers of fish caught by commercial fishermen, not by catching it themselves. Taking access to this fishery from 97% of the general public and giving it to 3% who fish on their own yachts for leisure isn't fair or equitable. With one stroke of the pen, NMFS has taken over half a million servings of red snapper off the plates of seafood consumers like you.

Captain Jim Zurbrick

Owner and Operator, f/v Jolly Rogers II, Steinhatchee, Florida

Throughout the reallocation discussions, government and independent scientists alike pointed out that reallocation will have negative impacts on the red snapper population:

- The Environmental Assessment for Amendment 28 concluded that "Increasing the recreational allocation...[leads] to a depressed stock size" in the Eastern Gulf of Mexico.

- The Gulf Council’s own Scientific and Statistical Committee concluded that the projected decline in the spawning stock in the Eastern Gulf “is exacerbated by increasing allocation to the recreational sector.”
- An independent analysis concluded that under realistic assumptions about recreational discard mortality using NMFS’s own estimates, “the Eastern Gulf stock is eventually fished to extinction” when following the projection model used by NMFS.

Commercial fishermen who have built business plans on this steadily recovering red snapper population are fearful for the future and what reallocation will bring, and how this ill-advised and poorly analyzed decision will impact red snapper conservation.

I just don’t understand how NMFS can ignore the science. Even NMFS’ own scientists say that reallocation is going to hurt red snapper in the Eastern Gulf. I know it doesn’t seem possible now, with so many red snapper being caught off Florida, but if you talk to real commercial fishermen like me who are out on the water, we’re starting to see some things that concern us. The really large fish just aren’t there anymore, and now the small fish are starting to disappear too. What we’re seeing on the water matches NMFS’s own stock projections, indicating major trouble ahead. Gulf-wide quotas are already projected to decrease over the next decade, and reallocation is only going to make things worse in the Eastern Gulf.

Captain David Walker

Owner and operator, f/v June Sue, Andalusia, Alabama

Many consider the recreational red snapper fishery to be the poster child for mismanagement, as evidenced by chronic overharvesting by that sector, continually shortened fishing seasons, a lack of legally-required accountability measures until recently in response to a court order, Gulf states that deliberately set longer fishing seasons in state waters that force a reduction in the fishing season in federal waters, and multiple dangerous legislative proposals being pushed by politicians in Washington DC that would subvert legal protections for this species.

For more than two decades NMFS has allowed the recreational sector -- which is open and unlimited access -- to regularly exceed its scientifically-established catch limits. Yet the recreational fishing season continues to get shorter every year even though the total quota has nearly tripled in the last decade. Individual recreational anglers have been shortchanged while their CCA “leadership” has wasted these years fighting for a reallocation that will likely not even give them one more day of fishing. Amendment 28 hurts commercial fishermen and seafood consumers, and does nothing to help increase the length of the recreational fishing season. Solutions to the problems in the recreational fishery exist, but taking away fish from the commercial sector and seafood consumers is not one of them.

Captain Shane Cantrell

Galveston Sea Ventures, Galveston, Texas

Executive Director, Charter Fisherman’s Association, Galveston, Texas

The impacts of such an irresponsible decision are likely to be felt outside of the Gulf of Mexico as other fishing regions face battles over reallocation and rebuilding fishery resources.

This reckless decision sends a dangerous message to commercial fishermen from Alaska to California, and Maine to Florida – if you are trying to solve a fishery problem, if you put together a successful management plan, if you build a small family fishing business, if you sacrifice to help rebuild a fishery for tomorrow and your children’s future, this federal agency will come and penalize you for your efforts by taking away your quota to appease a small but vocal minority that routinely exceeds its catch limits and resists any attempt at management reform.

Captain Steve Tomeny

f/v Louisiana, Port Fourchon, Louisiana

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