Fishermen Celebrate Responsible Gulf Management Decision

(Galveston, TX): Charter and commercial fishermen throughout the Gulf of Mexico celebrated today as the news came down from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) that Amendment 40 (Sector Separation) had been approved. The announcement came in the form of a letter from NMFS Regional Director to the Chairman of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council.

"This is a huge step forward for us," said Captain Steve Tomeny, Treasurer of the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance and charter captain from Port Fourchon, Louisiana. "We want to be accountable, like the commercial sector. We've spent years working to get a management plan that does that, and now we have it. The Gulf Council and NMFS listened to charter fishermen and got this one right."

Amendment 40 to the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Fishery Management Plan will formally recognize the differences between the charter for hire fleet and the private anglers that fish for red snapper, and will afford them the opportunity to develop management plans that work for their different needs and create more investment and control over their future. For instance, the charter for hire sector is limited access, mostly operates in federal waters and often under more restrictive management measures, and is believed to have the infrastructure to allow for real-time catch reporting. The private angler sector, on the other hand, is open access, mostly operates in state waters under noncompliant management measures, and is thought to lack the infrastructure for real-time catch reporting. As a result, NMFS has identified fundamental differences in the management uncertainty for each sector.

"After years of hard work, the charter for hire industry will finally be recognized as an industry and Amendment 40 paves the way for the entire recreational fishery to be on the path for accountable and sustainable management plans," said Captain Shane Cantrell, Executive Director of the Charter Fisherman's Association and charter captain out of Galveston, Texas.

With approval of Sector Separation occurring on April 10, implementation is expected in time for the start of the recreational red snapper fishing season on June 1.

"The commercial fishery is accountable and now the charter fishery will be too," said Buddy Guindon, Executive Director of the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance, owner of the commercial fishing vessel Falcon, and owner of Katie's Seafood Market in Galveston, Texas. "The U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia has already declared that the current system of recreational red snapper management violates the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The Judge even said that 'At a certain point NMFS was obligated to acknowledge that its strategy of incrementally shortening the season was not working. Administrative discretion is not a license to engage in Einstein's definition of folly – doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.' Sector Separation is a much needed new idea – it's a step towards breaking the chain of illegal and irresponsible recreational red snapper management."

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