

The Daily News.

Why fishermen support the Magnuson-Stevens Act



By BILLIE "BUBBA" COCHRANE

Oct 24, 2017

Every day I spend on the water, I am amazed by the size of the Gulf, its natural resources and all the work it takes to preserve them for future generations. Not too long ago, for example, the red snapper population was on the brink of collapse. But, thanks to commercial fishermen here in Galveston and across the Gulf states, backed by the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the fishery rebounded.

Today's red snapper recovery is a powerful success story. But, it's a fragile success, which is why Congress needs to protect Magnuson-Stevens.

In September, I shared this message with lawmakers in Washington when I testified before a U.S. Senate subcommittee. I told them America has set the gold standard for sustainable fisheries because of our commitment to science-based management.

Magnuson-Stevens is the system's backbone, and it is something we should all be proud of. Forty-one stocks have been rebuilt since 2001, and the number of stocks on the overfishing and overfished lists remains near all-time lows. Thanks to Magnuson-Stevens' science-based conservation requirements and the commercial IFQ (individual fishing quota) program, the red snapper quota for all fishermen — commercial, charter and recreational — in the Gulf has nearly tripled in the last 10 years, from 5 million to nearly 14 million pounds.

Under the IFQ system, I no longer have to race out to fish during the first 10 days of each month, regardless of weather, or waste perfectly good red snapper that I caught in excess of my daily trip limit, or suffer through low prices and market gluts.

Today's IFQ system allows me to run my own business with little interference — I can choose when I want to fish as long as I stop fishing once my quota is met. Commercial fishermen now supply American restaurants and fish markets with red snapper 365 days a year. We are stable, profitable, accountable and sustainable.

Certain recreational fishing voices are ignoring this success and are calling on Congress to abandon rebuilding plans in the name of "flexibility," which usually means creating loopholes to ignore science and taking more fish now than is sustainable. As the U.S. Department of Commerce recently acknowledged, circumventing conservation and science-based management will result in the recreational sector substantially exceeding its red snapper quota, which would tack on another six years to the timeline to fully rebuild the stock. This means that commercial and charter fishermen like me are getting taxed when the recreational sector blows through its quota. This isn't right.

Commercial fishermen support a sustainable, accountable, science-based solution to the Gulf's private angler challenges. Penalizing commercial fishermen is not the solution.

The nation's fishermen, seafood suppliers, consumers and congressional leaders are obligated to protect the gains we've made under the last 40 years of Magnuson-Stevens. We owe it to ourselves, our fishing communities and our children to pass on a natural resource legacy ensuring all Americans have access to sustainable seafood today and for generations to come.

Billy "Bubba" Cochrane lives in Galveston.

http://www.galvnews.com/opinion/guest_columns/article_da0e1efc-33d6-509c-9605-c69f9e5e1eea.html