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Gulf Council Rejects Public, Scientific Advice and Reallocates Red Snapper

(Galveston, TX): Seafood consumers, restaurateurs, wholesalers, retailers, commercial fishermen, charter fishermen, fish house owners, environmentalists, and scientists banded together in an unprecedented show of solidarity this week and watched as members of the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council snubbed their request for stability and conservation in the Gulf's red snapper fishery. In a precedent-setting move, the Gulf Council disregarded dozens of pages of scientific challenges, including from three independent scientists, hours of public testimony, and clear conclusions from their own staff and working groups, and instead voted to pass Amendment 28. This action will take quota from commercial fishermen, reduce access for seafood consumers, and reallocate quota to a recreational sector that has failed to manage itself.

"It's a slap in the face of over 12,000 people who asked the Council not to do this," said **Buddy Guindon, Executive Director of the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance based in Galveston, TX.** "The Coastal Conservation Association and their mouthpieces on the Council should be ashamed of themselves. They're going to claim this as a victory when all they've really done is misrepresent the science and mislead their members into thinking that they're going to get a stable and longer fishing season. It's wrong, and they know it."

"It's just not right," said **Glen Brooks, President of the Gulf Fishermen's Association, from Bradenton, Florida.** "There are pages and pages of analysis that conclude that reallocation hurts conservation, lacks economic justification, isn't fair to commercial fishermen, isn't supported by the public, is based on incomplete information, may violate federal laws, and doesn't actually solve the problem of federal recreational fishing seasons getting shorter and shorter."

"All we hear about is that federal recreational fishing seasons are getting shorter and shorter; but taking quota from commercial fishermen hurts our businesses and doesn't actually help this problem," said **Steve Tomeny, charter and commercial fisherman from Port Fourchon, Louisiana.** "How is giving private anglers more quota going to extend their seasons? Just look at the last few years – their quota keeps going up and their seasons keep getting shorter. Any quota that they get is going to get used up by the states going even more noncompliant with federal rules."

"Reallocation is going to hurt the red snapper population in the eastern Gulf," said **Wayne Werner, commercial fisherman from Alachua, Florida.** "If you don't believe me, read what the scientists wrote. I fish in the eastern Gulf – I know there's something wrong there. Recruitment is down and spawners are down and that's a bad sign for the future. Reallocation is going to make it worse and most of the Gulf Council doesn't give a damn."

"As commercial fishermen, we bit the bullet and took the quota cuts necessary to rebuild red snapper," said **Jim Zurbrick, commercial fisherman from Steinhatchee, Florida.** "At the same

time, the recreational sector kept on overharvesting and overharvesting. They got 100% of the benefit. Now they're getting rewarded again for ignoring conservation and ignoring science. How is that fair?"

"Even charter fishermen throughout the Gulf think reallocation is a very bad idea," said **Shane Cantrell, Executive Director of the Charter Fisherman's Association, in Galveston, Texas.** "Even though we're currently part of the recreational sector, the costs of reallocation outweigh any quota increase we would get. We don't believe that hurting commercial fishermen is the right thing to do. Reallocation sets a bad precedent and we don't want anything to do with that."

"Commercial fishermen are the means by which the average American experiences their fair share of Gulf seafood, including red snapper," said **Bill Tucker, commercial fisherman from Dunedin, Florida.** "Reallocation hurts fishermen like me, consumers like them, and everyone who interacts with that fish in between."

"I can't believe that the Council made such a bad decision," said **David Walker, commercial fisherman from Andalusia, Alabama and Member of the Gulf Council.** "I was sitting at that table and I know we didn't have enough information to justify reallocation, so I voted against it. So did the other Council members who speak for the commercial fishermen, charter fishermen, and the American seafood consumer. But the state directors and the private angler representatives didn't seem to care that there were information gaps, incomplete analyses, and legal flaws; they just steamrolled ahead."

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