

May 2, 2017

The Honorable Blake Farenthold
Chairman, House Subcommittee on
Interior, Energy and the Environment
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Stacey E. Plaskett
Ranking Member, House Subcommittee on
Interior, Energy and the Environment
331 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Farenthold and Ranking Member Plaskett,

As leading organizations representing America's seafood supply chain, including commercial harvesters, distributors, retailers, restaurants, charter operators and the customers they serve, we are writing to express our support for preserving federal management of the commercial and federally-permitted charter-for-hire red snapper communities in the Gulf of Mexico.

Preservation of the sustainable, federally-managed, commercial red snapper community and the newly-formed separate federal charter boat sector is the cornerstone of our philosophy when it comes to the broader red snapper policy debate. These two sectors combined represent approximately 75% of all red snapper caught in the Gulf and equate to substantial sales in terms of charter trips, restaurant meals and retail sales nationwide. Federal management of the commercial and charter Gulf red snapper fisheries is working very well. By adhering to the process outlined under the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Management Act (MSA), fishery managers in the Gulf have increased the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for all snapper fishermen from seven million pounds to the current TAC of fourteen million pounds, a success that can be enjoyed by consumers nationwide.

While we understand Congress' motivation to address challenges facing private anglers who comprise the remaining 25% of the Gulf red snapper fishery, doing so by extending Gulf state water boundaries via federal legislation and without full consideration by the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) is hasty and wrought with harmful, unintended consequences. By turning management of the entire fishery over to the states, Congress would inevitably impact the existing federal management of the commercial and charter communities, and may leave important components of our state's tourism economy (e.g. restaurants and charter fishing) without access to this iconic American species.

Efforts to increase accountability and improve the management of the private angling sector in the Gulf of Mexico must be implemented carefully so as not to impact the commercial or federally-permitted charter-for-hire communities. The Gulf Council, with its diverse membership comprised of experts, fishermen (commercial, charter and recreational), government officials, five Gulf state resource managers and scientists, is best-positioned to make balanced decisions.

As for addressing the longer-term challenges facing the entire Gulf seafood community, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Gulf states, and fishing communities must collaborate to develop comprehensive strategies to improve fisheries science in the Gulf of Mexico. Stakeholders across the Gulf agree that Gulf of Mexico fisheries data needs improvement. Programs that include real-time, verifiable, electronic collection of fisheries catches, like what is underway with the federally-permitted charter-for-hire fleet in the Gulf, should be implemented more broadly to give managers more accurate information on which to make seasonal decisions.

Please feel free to contact us regarding this critical issue. We look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Gulf Seafood Institute
Metairie, LA

National Restaurant Association
Washington, D.C.

National Fisheries Institute
Mclean, VA

Southeastern Fisheries Association
Tallahassee, FL

Charter Fisherman's Association
Corpus Christie, TX

Alabama Charter Fishermen's Association
Orange Beach, AL

Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance
Galveston, TX

Louisiana Restaurant Association
Metairie, LA