

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

February 17, 2015

The Honorable Penny Pritzker  
Secretary of Commerce  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Pritzker,

We write to you to reiterate the importance of timely, verifiable and accurate data on the red snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico. As you know, in its FY 2015 Omnibus Appropriations Act, Congress directed the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to utilize \$2 million to support a voluntary electronic data collection program for the charter-for-hire fishing community in the Gulf and other regions. As the Department of Commerce develops its spend plan for FY 2015, we urge you to obligate adequate resources from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and NMFS to support this program.

According to NOAA's Southeast Regional Office (SERO), the for-hire and private angler components of the recreational sector support 460,000 angler trips targeting and catching red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico annually. The fishery directly supports 759 jobs, generates \$113 million in business sales and contributes \$64 million to the national economy. Unfortunately, based on the "best available science" and data from the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) designed to monitor long-term trends over a large geographic area, fishery managers have shortened the recreational red snapper season length drastically in recent years, culminating in a 9-day season in 2014. These shortened season lengths have driven the fishing community into turmoil and diminished the public's trust in NOAA's ability to fairly manage this important resource. It is clear that additional, real-time data is needed to better understand the status of the fishery and provide fishery managers with adequate tools to make the best decisions for the Gulf red snapper resource and all user groups.

Many participants in the Gulf charter community have expressed willingness to install Electronic Logbooks (ELB) and Vessel Monitoring Systems (VMS) and accompanying software on their vessels in order to collect real-time, verifiable data that can supplement NMFS's current data collection program. This new, real-time data stream will more accurately reflect the impact of the recreational sector on the red snapper resource and may potentially lead to more realistic season lengths for all recreational anglers in the Gulf.

With this letter, we strongly encourage you to utilize these funds to roll out a robust electronic data collection program for the Gulf of Mexico charter community that can be implemented in time for the 2015 red snapper season this June. The Gulf region embodies the right management structure, strong stakeholder support and willingness at the Council-level to make supporting a Gulf electronic data collection program a very important investment for your Department. We are confident that with strong support from NMFS and participation by a majority of charter

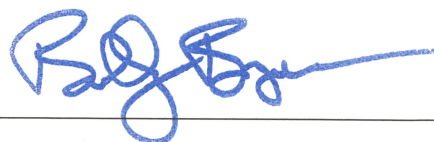
captains across the Gulf, this new electronic data collection program will succeed in providing fishery managers with a solid toolkit to make better, more reasonable management decisions that protect the Gulf red snapper fishery, our fishing communities and the broader Gulf coast economy.

Please contact us with any questions regarding this matter and we look forward to working with you.

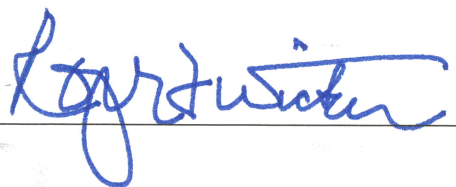


---

Sincerely,



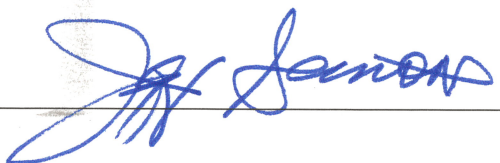
---



---

Blake Farenthold

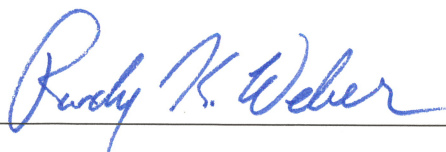
---



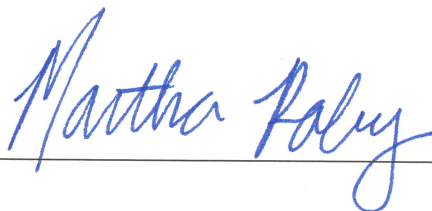
---



---



---



---



---



---