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## United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS  
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6025  
<http://appropriations.senate.gov>

April 22, 2015

The Honorable Penny Pritzker  
Secretary  
Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Pritzker:

As the Department moves forward with activities funded through the Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2015 (Public Law 113-235), I write to reinforce my strong concern with the mismanagement of the red snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico. NOAA's misguided practices, and the science behind them, have resulted in fewer fishing opportunities for commercial and recreational anglers year after year, which has a devastating impact on fishermen and businesses across the Gulf.

To help address this serious matter, the fiscal year 2015 Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies (CJS) appropriations bill, passed by Congress and signed by the President, included several provisions that I authored:

- (1) Funding to establish a cost-shared electronic reporting program for charter vessels in the Gulf of Mexico, which will allow them to have more days to fish for red snapper this year and into the future;
- (2) Directing NOAA to improve red snapper stock assessments in the Gulf by taking into account the population benefits for red snapper that are provided by artificial reefs and other offshore man-made structures, such as oil rigs;
- (3) Concluding that NOAA's data collection system, called the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), which serves as the primary source of information used to make management decisions for recreational fishing in the Gulf, is simply inadequate. The Committee found that MRIP has not yet achieved its intended purpose

— to provide increased certainty for NOAA to carry out more equitable management of the red snapper fishery; and

- (4) Requiring the Government Accountability Office to review MRIP methodologies, including the general practices and procedures of NOAA's fisheries science centers, to provide recommendations for how the agency can address the program's shortfalls.

The red snapper fishery is a key economic driver and an integral part of the way of life on the Gulf Coast. I believe that improved management, sounder science, and more accurate data will help both commercial and recreational fishermen gain increased access to the robust red snapper population in the Gulf of Mexico. That is why, as a longtime advocate for red snapper fishermen, I spearheaded these new accountability and oversight measures.

I share the frustration that Gulf Coast fishermen and coastal communities feel from NOAA's inaction. Now that the agency's amended spending plan for 2015 has been approved, I expect the agency to act immediately to begin improving the management of the red snapper fishery. As the Secretary of Commerce, I would appreciate your added vigilance over NOAA to ensure that these fishery reforms are implemented in a timely manner. I also request that the Department continue to keep me informed throughout the year on the progress that NOAA makes on the red snapper initiatives.

Thank you for your assistance on this matter. I look forward to continuing to work with you to help our coastal economies and local businesses thrive in the Gulf.

Sincerely,



Richard C. Shelby  
Chairman  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Commerce, Justice, Science, & Related Agencies