

THE SEAFOOD COALITION*

"Promoting science-based marine resource conservation and management"

April 29, 2015

The Honorable Marco Rubio, Chairman
Senate Commerce, Science & Transportation Committee
Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries and Coast Guard

The Honorable Cory Booker, Ranking Member
Senate Commerce, Science & Transportation Committee
Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries and Coast Guard

The Honorable Rob Bishop, Chairman
House Natural Resources Committee

The Honorable Raul Grijalva, Ranking Member
House Natural Resources Committee

Dear Chairman Rubio, Ranking Member Booker, Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva,

We write to you today to express our strongest objection to the move on the part of Louisiana Senator David Vitter to exempt Gulf of Mexico red snapper from management under the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act (M-SFCMA). This is being attempted both through the "Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority Act of 2015." We also oppose any similar attempts through amending H.R. 1335, the "Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act."

Since it was signed into law in 1976, responsible commercial, recreational and party/charter fishing groups have been deeply involved in fine tuning the M-SFCMA to guarantee the continuous health of our marine fisheries and of the people, businesses and communities that depend on their sustainable harvest. One of the strongest "selling points" of the legislation when it was originally written was the high level of fishing community involvement that was designed into the management process. This was and still is integral to an effective fisheries management process.

Senator Vitter's legislation would end that involvement in one of the most important fisheries – both recreationally and commercially – in the Gulf of Mexico.

In spite of the fact that the M-SFCMA isn't exactly the way any of us wants it to be at this time – we refer you to Congressman Young's H.R. 1335, the Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act for an idea of the much needed improvements that a majority of the commercial fishing industry supports – it is inarguably paying off in healthier fish stocks and has been for over a decade.

Unlike in a few other federal fisheries where management is accomplished by the states for conservation benefits and administrative efficiency, it appears as if the proposed legislation is just a ploy supported by recreational fishing groups to reallocate part or all of the commercial catch of Gulf red snapper to the recreational sector – something that its supporters seem to think is necessary because the recreational anglers can't come close to staying within their Magnuson mandated quotas. For example, in 2013 the recreation-

al Total Allowable Catch (TAC) allowed to the recreational fishery was 5.41 million pounds. For commercial fishermen it was 5.61 million pounds. According to NOAA/NMFS the total recreational mortality – red snapper killed but not necessarily kept by recreational anglers – was 9.05 million pounds. Commercial landings were 5.28 million pounds. The recreational anglers took 167% of their TAC and the commercial fishermen took 94%.

The fact that the state fisheries departments support this action should be considered in the context that each of those departments gets a major part of its funding from the federal Wallop-Breaux program. The Wallop-Breaux funds are derived from a federal tax on recreational fishing and boating supplies and equipment. An increase in recreational red snapper fishing effort means increased recreational fishing supplies and equipment expenditures, which means bigger budgets for the state fisheries agencies.

We as members of the Seafood Coalition realize that our future in the fisheries is dependent on an open and equitable management process focused on sustainability that will allow all of our citizens, both those who fish and those who don't, reasonable access to fishery resources that are managed for everyone. This level of management is provided by the M-SFCMA and is responsible for the constant improvement in the health of our fish stocks. We oppose this or any other departure from the Act that will hold management of any fishery captive to political pressure brought by special interests and that could grant rights to particular species like red snapper to exclusive user groups.

Sincerely,



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***Alliance of Communities for Sustainable Fisheries, American Albacore Fishing Association, Blue Water Fishermen's Association, California Wetfish Producers Association, Coos Bay Trawlers Association, Directed Sustainable Fisheries, Inc., Fisheries Survival Fund, Fishermen's Dock Cooperative, Florida Keys Commercial Fishermen's Association, Garden State Seafood Association, Long Island Commercial Fishing Association, Midwater Trawlers Cooperative, Monkfish Defense Fund, North Carolina Fisheries Association, Organized Fishermen of Florida, Pacific Seafood Processors Association, South Carolina Seafood Alliance, Southeastern Fisheries Association, Southern Offshore Fishing Association, United Catcher Boats, Washington Trollers Association, West Coast Seafood Processors Association, Western Fishboat Owners Association**