

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance Support for the Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing Act of 2015 (H.R. 774)

The Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance (Shareholders' Alliance) and the commercial fishermen and women we represent are strong advocates for sustainable management of our marine resources in the Gulf of Mexico. We believe that healthy fish populations bring stable fishing businesses, profitable fishing communities, and a stable source of sustainable, domestically-harvested seafood that Americans consumer deserve to enjoy.

The Gulf's red snapper population continues to rebound thanks to a sustainable commercial management plan. Quotas are increasing for everyone, red snapper are getting larger, and are being caught more easily by many fishermen from Texas to Florida. Unfortunately, this rebound brings with it a new threat – the poaching of red snapper and other reef fish by Mexican fishermen illegally fishing in US waters.

“Mexican nationals routinely and illegally enter U.S. sovereign waters off the coast of Texas and other Gulf states to steal the fish we've worked hard to rebuild,” **said Buddy Guindon, Executive Director of the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance, commercial fisherman and owner of Katie's Seafood Market in Galveston, Texas.** According to U.S. Coast Guard data more than 1,100 illegal fishing operations happen each year, harvesting three-quarters-of-a-million pounds of fish annually. Many of these illegally-caught fish end up back in US markets, impacting the bottom line of thousands of U.S. commercial fishing businesses. “It's too bad that all the US Coast Guard can do right now after catching these fishermen is confiscate their boat and what they've caught, and send them back over the boarder to Mexico,” **said Steve Tomeny, commercial and charter fisherman from Port Fourchon, Louisiana.** “There they just find another boat and head back into US waters to continue poaching.”

That is why we wholeheartedly support the passage of H.R. 774. “Approving this bill will level the playing field for U.S. fishermen like us by protecting fish from pirate fishermen and keeping cheap, illegal seafood out of the market,” **said Jason DeLaCruz, Executive Director of Gulf Wild, commercial fisherman and owner of Wild Seafood Co. in John's Pass, Florida.** This bill will expedite and simplify existing enforcement protocols, strengthen the ability of the Coast Guard and other law enforcement agents to detect and deter foreign illegal fishing activity both in our waters and on the high seas, and keep foreign illegal fishing criminals and their contraband out of U.S. ports. This bill increases penalties and sanctions against foreign IUU fishermen and prevents port entry, access, and supplies to foreign fishing vessels that are known to be involved in illegal fishing.

The Shareholders' Alliance thanks the 16 cosponsors from our Gulf Coast delegation, as well as the nearly 25 cosponsors from other states and territories, for advancing this bipartisan piece of common-sense legislation in the House. We hope that the Senate will follow suit. Protecting America's fisheries from illegal foreign poachers is something that all fishermen – commercial, charter, and private anglers - can rally around.

The Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance is a non-profit organization that represents the interests of commercial reef fish fishermen and other stakeholders in the Gulf of Mexico. We work hard to maintain accountability and conservation-based management for our region's fisheries for today and future generations. By working closely with regional managers, state agencies, and federal representatives, we strive to stabilize and improve fishery management to ensure that we can continue to provide the American public with a sustainable source of domestically-caught Gulf of Mexico seafood. Everything we do is founded in our belief that conservation and stewardship protect fish populations and fishermen's businesses.

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