

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 9, 2022

Mr. Mel Bell
Chairman
South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council
4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201
North Charleston, SC 29405

Dear Mr. Bell,

We write today to share a letter that we, along with a bipartisan bicameral group of 28 other Members of Congress and Senators sent to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Administrator Richard Spinrad. We have serious concerns with the ongoing discussions about possible area and season closures in the South Atlantic.

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council has undertaken the difficult task of rebuilding the depleted red snapper stock. By all accounts, these efforts have been wildly successful, with everyone recognizing that recruitment has been strong, and abundance is higher than most anglers have seen in their lifetime. This has been achieved thanks to efforts by managers and anglers.

That is why discussions about area and seasonal closures are so concerning. Anglers have acted in good faith over the last ten years to rebuild the stock of this highly sought-after fish. To suddenly not allow fishing in large swaths of the ocean not just for red snapper, but many other affected species would be an insult to those anglers. This is to say nothing of the significant economic implications it would have. In the state of Florida recreational fishing alone provides \$14 billion in economic output. Area closures would have significant effects on all sectors of the industry including the many small businesses that support the fishing industry across the South Atlantic.

We have heard complaints from our constituents about the lack of good data on this important fishery, for that reason over the last three years we secured \$5.1 million to do the South Atlantic Great Red Snapper Count and fill holes in current data. This study is ongoing and expected to provide data by 2025. We hope that you will suspend consideration of area closures and other significant management decisions until this important data is incorporated into a stock assessment before making any sweeping changes.

We look forward to partnering with you to find solutions that can increase access while maintaining the health of these important stocks.

Sincerely,


John H. Rutherford
Member of Congress


Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 4, 2022

Richard Spinrad
Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
14th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Administrator Spinrad,

We write today to share our serious concerns and urge you not to consider area closures in the South Atlantic for the red snapper fishery. While it is important to ensure that our fisheries are managed in a sustainable way, area closures would have immense economic implications in our states and we currently lack the independent data to support the decision. Red snapper is a highly sought-after species in the South Atlantic and major economic driver. In 2018 alone, the 6-day recreational season added \$13 million to the gross domestic product (GDP) for the region.

Over the last 10 years, fisheries managers have been working to regrow the red snapper stock, and by all accounts, these efforts have been successful. Anyone who has been out on the water recently will tell you that red snapper are plentiful. However, the current methods and data used to determine the health of the stock and ultimately inform management decisions prevent us from having an accurate picture of many red snapper are actually in the South Atlantic.

We now find ourselves in a catch 22. We regularly hear from our constituents that red snapper are so abundant they are all people can catch, yet the recreational season this year was only two days. As the stock has grown, and more encounters are happening out of season, more fish are being discarded and ultimately dying because of pressure-related injuries. These discards ultimately count against fishermen, leaving them with short or non-existent seasons, even after complying with all the rules.

Now, on top of a short red snapper season, it is our understanding that there are discussions about broad area or season closures of all bottom fishing to stop red snapper encounters altogether. This decision would be crippling economically for our states that rely heavily on our coastal economy. Area closures would have significant effects on commercial fishermen, for-hire captains, recreational fishermen, and all the businesses that support our robust fishing industry.

Before closures are considered, it is vital that we use the best and most up to date science when making management decisions for the red snapper fishery. To that end, Congress has provided \$5.1 million over the last three years for the South Atlantic Great Red Snapper Count. This study, which began in 2021, will provide independent data on the red snapper population by 2025. To make a decision with such sweeping consequences when we have better data from the Great Red Snapper Count and state surveys on the way would be irresponsible.

We urge you to suspend all considerations of area closures and other significant management decisions until the Great Red Snapper Count and other independent data is completed and integrated in the stock assessment process.

Sincerely,


John H. Rutherford
Member of Congress


Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress


Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator


Rick Scott
United States Senator



Lindsey O. Graham
United States Senator

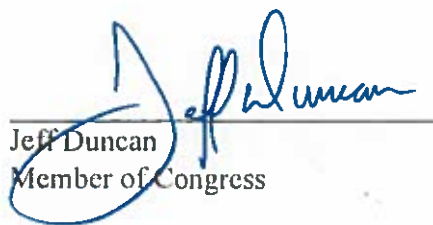

Tim Scott
United States Senator


Daniel Webster
Member of Congress


Nancy Mace
Member of Congress


Brian J. Mast
Member of Congress


Earl L. "Buddy" Carter
Member of Congress



Jeff Duncan
Member of Congress



Mario Diaz-Balart
Member of Congress



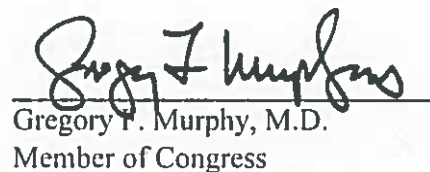
Maria Elvira Salazar
Member of Congress



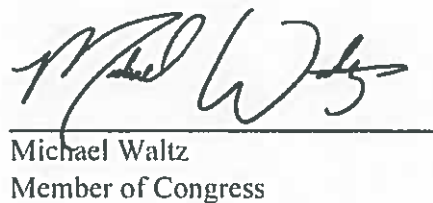
Joe Wilson
Member of Congress



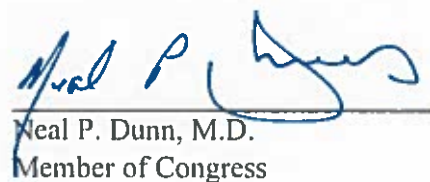
Al Lawson
Member of Congress



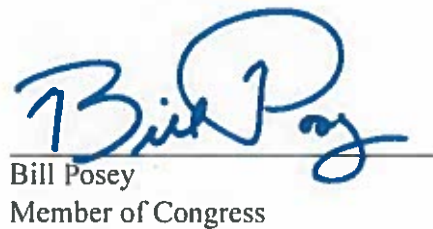
Gregory P. Murphy, M.D.
Member of Congress



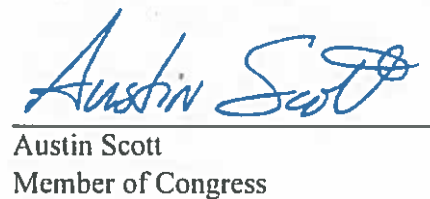
Michael Waltz
Member of Congress



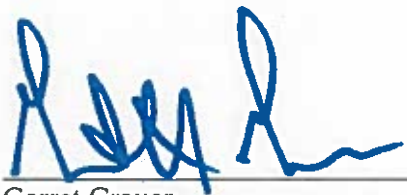
Neal P. Dunn, M.D.
Member of Congress



Bill Posey
Member of Congress



Austin Scott
Member of Congress



Garret Graves
Member of Congress



A. Drew Ferguson IV
Member of Congress



C. Scott Franklin
Member of Congress



Richard Hudson
Member of Congress



Byron Donalds
Member of Congress



Gus M. Bilirakis
Member of Congress



Ted Budd
Member of Congress



Kat Cammack
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Val Butler Demings
Member of Congress



Darren Soto
Member of Congress