

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 7, 2012

The Honorable John Bryson
Secretary of Commerce
United States Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Bryson:

We are writing today on behalf of the South Atlantic fishermen who are being forced off the water and out of business by onerous and unnecessary federal regulations on our fisheries. In an effort to preserve the region's coastal industries and deep fishing heritage, we are asking the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council (SAFMC) to issue an emergency opening of the red snapper fishery in the South Atlantic region until a new stock assessment is completed.

The South Atlantic fishery has been closed for over 900 days with no new red snapper stock assessment scheduled. This closure has caused severe economic hardship for charter and head boat businesses. Commercial fishermen have seen their incomes slashed. Many recreational fishermen have been forced to put away their rods and reels. The economic devastation extends far beyond anglers, to the tackle stores, marinas, restaurants, and hotels that rely on the fisheries to fuel their business.

The SAFMC's decision to close the red snapper fishery for more than 900 days without any plan in place for a new stock assessment runs counter to provisions in the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) that establish 10 national standards that must be met before the regional councils can implement new fisheries management decisions. We are concerned that the closed fishery falls short of these MSA standards by failing to provide for the optimum yield, failing to provide the best scientific data, failing to provide for the sustained participation of fishing communities, and failing to minimize adverse economic impacts on such communities.

We have heard from local fishermen who believe the ban has led to an excessive surplus in the red snapper population, making it more difficult to catch grouper and other fish due to the red snapper overabundance. Seafood markets are being forced to import other fish just to have product for sale. Lifelong fishermen are telling us of seeing, for the first time in their lives, that large red snapper could be chummed to the surface. While these personal accounts may be difficult to quantify, they provide clear evidence of a fishery out of balance.

Former SAFMC chairman Duane Harris wrote to then-Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke in April 2010 warning of specific economic damage that would occur if a closure was approved. These warnings are now coming to pass. It is passed time that a sound fisheries management system be implemented on behalf of the fishermen of the South Atlantic.

We request that the SAFMC act promptly to reopen the red snapper fishery for a season that is substantial enough to empower our fishermen and coastal industries to recover from this crippling 900 day layoff.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our concerns and we look forward to working with you to keep our fishermen fishing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Steve Southerland, II", written over a horizontal line.

Steve Southerland, II

CC: Dr. Roy Crabtree, NOAA Fisheries Regional Administrator
Members of the South Atlantic Marine Fishery Council

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