

ATTACHMENT 6:

**SAMPLE NEWS STORIES REGARDING RED SNAPPER CLOSURE AND THE
NOVEMBER 2009 SAFMC PUBLIC HEARINGS**

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=122007340&sc=emaf> (listen online)



Fishermen Reeling Over Red Snapper Fishing Ban

by [Greg Allen](#)

January 4, 2010

In Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas, a new federal rule has fishermen angry. A ban on fishing for red snapper—one of the most popular saltwater fish — starts Jan. 4.

Federal agencies and environmental groups say that in the south Atlantic, red snapper numbers are dwindling. So along with the ban, officials also propose temporarily closing a huge area to virtually all fishing.

To people who don't fish or don't live in the Southeast, it might seem like a lot of fuss over one species. But in fishing communities like St. Augustine, Fla., the red snapper is more than just a fish.

It's the reason thousands of anglers visit each year. The new rules are a blow to coastal communities around the Southeast, like St. Augustine, that depend on recreational fishing.

Robert Johnson is a charter boat captain who has fished for red snapper off the eastern coast of Florida for nearly 30 years. When his charter business slows down, he also fishes for them commercially.

According to Johnson, the average snapper measures around 2 feet long and weighs between 6 and 7 pounds. But he says he has caught fish that weigh up to 30 pounds.

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Red snapper can live to 50 years old and grow to 20 pounds or more. But fish that old — and big — are very rare — a clear indication, scientists say, of how much they've been overfished.

Snapper Numbers Rapidly Dwindling

Today, the National Marine Fisheries Service estimates that the population of red snapper off the Atlantic Coast is just 3 percent of what it was 60 years ago. Citing these numbers, the service has put in place a six-month interim ban on fishing for red snapper with an option to extend it further.

Roy Crabtree, regional administrator for the National Marine Fisheries Service in the Southeast, says that the science leaves little doubt that the population of red snapper in the south Atlantic has been severely depleted.

"I think the only real debate is the extent of the overfishing," Crabtree says. "But I don't believe there is a whole lot of scientific debate about whether the stock is undergoing overfishing or is overfished."

Fishermen Doubt The Numbers

Johnson and others in the recreational fishing industry question the methodology used to estimate the red snapper population.

Their doubts are supported by the National Research Council, which has called into question the government's process for estimating catches and fish populations.

Johnson believes that while red snapper have been overfished, limits on catches have done a lot in recent years to help rebuild the species.

"They still keep claiming that we're fishing at eight times the sustainable rate, and I just don't see that being true," Johnson says. "If that was the case ... the amount of fish we're catching per trip would fall. It would not be consistently the same over the last 10 years. And it definitely would not be getting better."

Coastal Towns Feel Economic Ramifications

For Johnson, there's a lot at stake. He says at least 60 percent of his customers come out to fish for red snapper or other bottom species like grouper, which are also now off-limits. And even more alarming than the red snapper ban is another proposal now being considered, which would close some 10,000 square miles of the Atlantic, from North Carolina to Florida, to virtually all fishing.

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[Enlarge](#) Greg Allen/NPR

Robert Johnson caught nearly 100 red snapper on a recent day trip. He says he questions the methodology used to estimate the red snapper population.

Johnson says that will very likely put him and the two dozen other charter captains in the town of St. Augustine out of business and take a toll on the restaurants, hotels and others in town who benefit from the influx of anglers.

Holly Binns, with the Pew Environment Group's campaign to end overfishing in the Southeast, says people who want to fish will still have other options.

"I think it's important to keep in mind that 80 percent of what recreational fishermen caught in the waters off the coast of these four states last year will still be open to fishing," Binns says.

She concedes, however, that communities in areas like St. Augustine that depend on red snapper will be the hardest hit.

That's something Dave Workman already knows. He owns the Strike Zone, a fishing outfitter in Jacksonville that carries everything from reels and tackle to kayaks. He says customers have already

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stopped buying fishing tackle and he expects business to get much worse once the red snapper ban goes into effect.

Like others in the industry, Workman thinks the government has greatly underestimated the ban's economic impact. He estimates that the losses to his two stores as a result of the ban will be more than \$300,000 per year.

A group called the Recreational Fishing Alliance has filed a lawsuit seeking to block the ban on red snapper fishing from taking effect on Jan. 4 as planned. Federal regulators may decide whether to approve the larger area ban when it meets in March. Meanwhile, a bipartisan group in Congress from coastal districts is working on a bill that would require federal regulators to consider the impact on local economies before ordering future fishery closings.

<http://www.islandpacket.com/opinion/story/1089152.html> (Opinion)



Long term should guide red snapper regulations

Published Tuesday, January 5, 2010

Short-term pain for long-term gain is the best way to describe a plan to ban bottom fishing along the Continental Shelf from Charleston to south Florida.

The plan aims to save the popular but imperiled red snapper, which is at just 3 percent of its 1945 population level. Forty-percent of that 1945 level is thought to be a sustainable population.

The fish can live for more than 50 years and are often caught before their best spawning years. Today, few are older than 10.

Federal law required the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to take action by 2010 after population assessments concluded the red snapper was over-fished.

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A ban in deep-sea areas would seem the shorter route to recovery. The more breeding population that is left in place, the more quickly the snapper's numbers would grow.

The bottom fishing ban comes because red snapper often don't survive if they are caught while fishermen target other species. The plan would prohibit bottom fishing for grouper in deep-sea spots. It leaves open popular locations closer to shore.

Deep-sea catches are particularly hazardous for red snapper, according to the Pew Environment Group, because many die when thrown back. Their internal organs can explode when they are pulled up quickly from their deep-sea habitat.

Few seem satisfied with the council's decision.

Many commercial and recreational anglers opposed closing the bottom, saying it wasn't needed and would drive them out of business. The bottom-fishing ban could remove local catches of the popular grouper fish.

Representatives of the Pew Environment Group say the council didn't go far enough. The decision reversed a committee decision that would have closed a larger area.

Holly Binns, manager for the Pew Environment Group's Campaign to End Overfishing in the Southeast, said in a statement that the change resulted in "a weakened measure that caters to short-term thinking and won't get the job done."

The closure is one of a number of regulations being considered to protect snapper-grouper species, which counts indicate have been depleted. But any rules adopted might not stay in place long.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is proposing new guidelines for assessing fish stocks. The recent decision was based on 2008 stock assessments. The agency also is beginning a move to allocating catch shares -- giving anglers a specific number of fish they can catch rather than limits on individual species -- and limiting the number of anglers who can fish.

In the Gulf of Mexico, red snapper are showing signs of recovery after a 5 million-pound quota was put in place in February 2008 for recreational and commercial fishers.

The Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council could decide as soon as February to expand that quota to 6.9 million pounds, a move some caution against, given the time it takes the species to grow to reproductive maturity.

Short-term complaints must be weighed against the long-term payoff. The red snapper population is unlikely to get back to sustainable levels unless major steps are taken. The sooner those steps are taken, the sooner the snapper can recover and the sooner limits can be lifted.

<http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20100103/SPORTS05/1030324/1002/SPORTS/Nail+s+catch+likely+last+of+its+kind+for+some+time>



January 3, 2010

Nail's catch likely last of its kind for some time

*BY BILL SARGENT
FLORIDA TODAY*



Ronnie Nail shows off the 24-pound prized red snapper that was part of a limit catch of eight snapper taken offshore Port Canaveral on New Year's Eve.

It may be the last red snapper catch for months -- or even years -- because of the closure on all red snapper fishing starting Monday in federal waters offshore Florida, Georgia and the Carolinas. The

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closure will last a minimum of 180 days, and it is expected to be extended at least another 186 days by the NOAA Fisheries Service.

Nail, along with his son, Corey Nail, and Chris Delaney, all of Melbourne, were aboard the Canaveral charter boat Cool Beans with Capt. Tim Fletcher of Merritt Island.

In five hours, the party landed 35 red snapper using cut bait, releasing all but their catch limit. They took a second sow snapper weighing 25 pounds, plus a 16-pound grey grouper.

Grouper fishing for 11 different species also closed Friday under an NOAA Fisheries Service plan that continues through April 30.

Fletcher, a veteran captain out of Canaveral, said because of the bottom fishing closures, he and other charter captains will have little choice but to target mostly kingfish for their charters.

"It's going to put a lot of extra pressure on kingfish," Fletcher predicted. "We'll also go for cobia and other species when they're available."

(Note: There are several comments associated with this article)

<http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20091105/NEWS01/911050321/1006/Plan+leaves+snapper+fishermen+in+a+knot>



November 5, 2009

Plan leaves snapper anglers empty handed

*BY JIM WAYMER
FLORIDA TODAY*

Red snapper fight like mad. And if they're made off limits, so will fishermen such as Billy Golding.

"Who wants to go fishing and throw back everything they catch?" said Golding, captain of the Miss Cape Canaveral, a 100-passenger "party" boat at Port Canaveral.

Under a ban on fishing for red snapper, Miss Cape Canaveral and other such boats would have to rely on top-water fish, such as kingfish, dolphin and cobia, which can be tougher to catch and less tasty.

Federal regulators want the total yearly red snapper kill cut by up to 88 percent to end overfishing -- a limit of 79,000 pounds by next year. And that's only the fish killed inadvertently as "bycatch."

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The South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council proposes year-round closures from Florida to South Carolina of sport and commercial fishing for red snapper and other bottom fish, including many other popular grouper and snapper. The council would ban fishing for the other species as a way to prevent bycatch.

The final vote could come as early as March.

Within the closed area, fishing would be prohibited for all 73 managed snapper and grouper species -- including common fish such as sheepshead -- to prevent hooking red snapper.

The council proposes several alternative areas for the ban: One would include water from 98 to 240 feet deep, about 8,100 square miles. Others expand to as much as 26,600 square miles. Another closes all areas from 240 feet deep seaward to seven snapper and grouper species, except for tilefish.

The agency says the ban would have "the most widespread social and economic impacts of any decision in recent . . . history." It estimates at least a \$16.5 million impact to Florida's \$5.4 billion saltwater fishing industry.

Some fishing charters in Brevard County fear much worse and say a ban could sink them, possibly for good, not to mention bait shops and other small businesses that depend on the popular fish.

The closure also could force local seafood markets to rely on more expensive imports of snapper and grouper. Some expect another \$1 or more per pound for those tasty red snapper fillets, for example, which sell for \$17 to \$18 a pound.

A long history

Red snapper in the South Atlantic have been overfished for several decades, according to a 2008 federal stock assessment.

Most red snapper are caught and killed by sport fishermen. The snapper population increased somewhat after 1992, when a 20-inch size limit and a two-fish bag limit took effect. But the recent increase is small compared with large reductions before then, biologists say.

The stock assessment shows fish caught and killed at nine times the maximum sustainable level since 1960 and about 7.7 times in 2006.

The goal, as dictated by federal law, is to maximize the catch year after year and end overfishing within one year.

Fishery managers use landing records, logbooks, surveys and onboard observations to assess fish stocks. They also count growth rings in ear bones to determine the age of fish. They devise statistical models based on this information.

Red snapper live for more than 50 years, but fish older than 10 years are seldom caught, biologists say. They call this a sign that too many fish are getting caught before their most reproductive age near 10.

"The numbers that we would expect to see in a healthy population are just not there," said Bonnie Ponwith, director of the Southeast Fisheries Science Center, a federal research laboratory in Miami.

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Anglers' dissent

But fishermen describe banner catches of the fish in recent years. They say scientists have no clue about historic red snapper populations.

"Not only do they have bad information, they don't want good information," said Jerry Sansom, executive director of the Organized Fishermen of Florida, which represents about 800 commercial fishermen.

They also criticize scientists' failure to do sufficient tagging studies. Tagging helps improve stock assessment models by allowing better estimates of natural death rates -- among the most difficult and important aspects of stock assessment. They also yield clues about growth rates and how many fish die after being caught and released.

The red snapper "crisis" results from errors by statisticians trying to extrapolate the fish population from 1980, when the first reliable data was collected, back to 1945, David Heil, president of the South Atlantic Chapter of the Fishing Rights Alliance, wrote in a news release.

"These errors produced a false population spike for the late 1960s at 33 times the current population," he wrote.

Heil points to doubts about the stock assessment raised by fishing industry consultant Frank Hester, who has taken federal biologists to task for overestimating past stocks and the number of older fish killed.

Nobody wins?

Three companies run six "party" or "head" boats out of Port Canaveral that fish for snapper and grouper. The worst aspect of the proposed rules, owners and captains said, is a ban on bottom fishing in water more than 98 feet deep, out to 200 miles, to prevent killing red snapper as a bycatch.

Seafood sellers said they would switch to imported snapper and grouper, likely from Mexico.

"I don't think anybody wins in that kind of regulation," said Michael Merrifield, general manager at Wild Ocean Seafood Market in Titusville, which sells to individuals and to restaurants. "I'm all about conservation. What we're not in favor of is draconian measures."

And the fishermen provide scientists with a snapshot of how red snapper are doing. Federal biologists acknowledge that aspect.

"That is actually a very, very big concern of ours," said Ponwith of the Southeast Fisheries Science Center.

Scientists are in the process of designing a research plan, she said, to determine how to make up for the data gap in a future ban.

'An overreaction'

Many fishermen point an angry finger at The Pew Charitable Trusts, a nonprofit that lobbied hard for the snapper and grouper bans.

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"Unfortunately, I think the science is pretty clear," said Holly Binns, manager for Pew's Campaign to End Overfishing in the Southeast. "Although these are drastic measures, they are necessary if we want to make sure that we have a red snapper population that can provide jobs and recreational opportunities for years to come."

Regulators say fishermen should expect at least a three- to five-year ban, which could shrink in area, if a new stock assessment in 2011 shows a more robust red snapper population.

Fishermen whose livelihoods depend on the fish said they can't wait that long.

"It's just an overreaction to a situation that was a long time building," Sansom said. "Closing it down is the worst option for everybody."

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Additional Facts

Effects of a ban on red snapper

- Economic impacts to Florida's recreational fishing, which includes "party" or "head" boats, could range from \$7.8 million to \$16.1 million. Most snapper are caught by recreational fishermen.
- The commercial fishery in the South Atlantic could lose up to \$187,540 of an estimated \$376,000 worth of red snapper per year. In 2007, the commercial fishery for red snapper harvested 108,000 pounds of red snapper.
- Some expect another \$1 or more per pound for those tasty red snapper fillets, for example, which sell for \$17 to \$18 a pound.

Sources: South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the fishing industry



<http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20091112/NEWS01/911120322/1006>

Anglers fear snapper ban will bring disaster

Livelihoods are on the line, at mercy of bad science, they say

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Anglers Seeing Red Over Red Snapper Ban



http://www.cfnews13.com/News/Local/2009/11/11/anglers_seeing_red_over_proposed_snapper_ban.html



<http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20091111/BREAKINGNEWS/91111018/1006/news01/Angry+anglers+attack+proposed+ban+on+snapper+fishing>

Angry anglers attack proposed ban on snapper fishing

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news
jacksonville.com

http://jacksonville.com/news/metro/2009-11-13/story/red_snappers_a_plenty_first_coast_fishermen_say

(Front page news in Jacksonville, FL - with photos)

Red snappers a plenty, First Coast fishermen say

They say the proposed additional protections for the species just aren't needed.

- By [Topher Sanders](#)
- Story updated at 7:14 AM on Friday, Nov. 13, 2009

First Coast fishermen told the federal agency responsible for protecting fish along the Southeast coast that there are plenty of red snapper and the species doesn't need any additional protections.

The comments came Thursday afternoon, during the penultimate public hearing in Jacksonville by the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council to seek input on their proposed snapper/grouper management measures.

About 300 people, mostly fishermen, packed the hearing in a ballroom at the Crowne Plaza Riverfront hotel on the Southbank

Red snapper was the focus of the meeting and most speakers blasted the measure that aims to end overfishing, set annual catch limits, accountability measures, rebuild stock and establish a monitoring program.

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Robert DeVincentis, a diver and fisherman, said he sees large schools of snapper when he dives and questioned the studies the council is using to evaluate red snapper stock.

“The people in this room know more about the fishery than any study,” he said. Families of people who make their living fishing would bare the brunt of red snapper closure, he continued.

“The socioeconomic ramifications of this closure will be catastrophic for many, many families,” DeVincentis said.

Holly Binns, Tallahassee-based manager of a campaign to end overfishing run by an arm of the Pew Charitable Trusts, agreed that fishermen are seeing more red snapper because the species recently had a few good years of reproduction.

But most of the fish are young, she said, and have not reached prime reproductive ages. If the current stock continues to be fished at current rates it could mean disaster for the future of red snapper, she said.

“If we can give red snapper a break,” Binns said, “...we have a really good chance to put this fish on the road to recovery.”

An 84 to 88 percent reduction in the total kill of red snapper is necessary to end overfishing, according to the council.

The update to the American fishing policy, the 1976 Magnuson-Stevens Act, which was drafted by Congress in 2006 required fishery management councils to know which species were being caught too fast to sustain their populations, then adopt fishing rules that would let those species rebuild.

Those protective rules had to be adopted within a year of when the management council recognized a problem, the new law said.

The council’s final public hearing is on Nov. 16 in Newport News, Va. The council will spend the next month reviewing the comments it has received during the public hearings series, spokeswoman Kim Iverson said.

The council could vote on the measure at its upcoming December meeting in Atlantic Beach, N.C. But Iverson said it is likely it will postpone the vote until March 2010 in order to more thoroughly review the comments and materials related to measure.

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<http://www.news4jax.com/news/21598826/detail.html>

(See news video and comments by accessing the above link)

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Fishermen Against Red Snapper Ban

Studies Show Red Snapper In Decline At 3 Percent Of 1945 Level

POSTED: Thursday, November 12, 2009

UPDATED: 5:52 pm EST November 12, 2009

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. -- Hundreds of fishermen all along the coast say a government-imposed fishing ban will destroy a thriving Florida industry.

The proposed ban would shut down the red snapper and grouper industry from South Carolina through central Florida.

"I have been fishing all my life," said fisherman Randolph Starling, who's against the proposal.

"I don't know anything but fishing. And I know a lot of men that rely on this occupation."

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council is looking over the temporary fishing ban.

Their studies show the red snapper is in real decline at 3 percent of the 1945 level.

Most fisherman, though, aren't buying the numbers.

Video:  [Studies Show Red Snapper Decline](#)

"I am just a regular old recreational fisherman," fisherman Tony Sellers said. "They're saying that we overfished. I have been fishing with my dad here since I was a kid, and there is more snapper out there and bigger than I can ever remember."

Commercial fishermen said the proposed ban, even though temporary, would hurt the entire industry.

"They are proposing to close large, vast areas of ocean out here, up to 22,000 square miles off our coast," Capt. Dennis Young said. "If they do that it will eliminate the day-to-day use of their boats, the guys buying gas at the gas station, the guys buying bait. That's going to vibrate completely through this economy."

The loud debate is expected to go on for weeks, and a vote may come in December.

Not everyone is against the proposal. Those with the Pew Environmental Group said it's needed.

"I don't think anybody likes that we are at the point where we have to think that this is the option," environmental group member Holly Binns said. "But unfortunately, the council has looked at pretty much every way since Sunday to try to get out of having to do this, but the bottom line is this is what needs to happen if we want to protect red snapper and have it around for future generations."

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<http://www.thesunnews.com/> (Myrtle Beach, SC)

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Outdoors notebook: Deadline for comments on SAFMC amendments Nov. 25

By Gregg Holshouser - For The Sun News

The deadline for commentary on the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's proposed management measures within Amendments 17A, 17B, and Amendment 18 to the Snapper Grouper Fishery Management Plan is Nov. 25.

Fishermen and others with a vested interest in the charter fishing and seafood industry along the South Atlantic coast can voice their opinion on these critical issues, which include alternatives to close large areas off the South Atlantic coast to all bottom fishing in order to protect stocks of red snapper.

Six public hearings have already been held on the proposals, including meetings in Charleston and New Bern, N.C. One more meeting is scheduled, for Monday in Newport News, Va.

Written comments may be submitted to Bob Mahood, Executive Director, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place Drive, Suite 201, North Charleston, SC 29405. Visit www.safmc.net to find e-mail addresses to comment individually on the amendments or for more information on the amendments. The deadline for comments is 5 p.m. on Nov. 25.

News Clips

Fishermen protest proposed red snapper ban

Channel 2 Orlando, NBC Affiliate

<http://www.wesh.com/news/21588169/detail.html>

Bottom fishing ban faces vocal opposition

WFTV, Orlando

November 11, 2009

<http://www.wftv.com/news/21588286/detail.html>

Fishermen fight ban on bottom fishing

WFTV, Orlando

Nov. 11, 2009

<http://www.wftv.com/video/21588831/index.html>

Angry anglers attack proposed ban on snapper fishing

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By Jim Waymer, Florida Today

Nov.11, 2009

<http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20091111/BREAKINGNEWS/91111018/1006/news01/Angry+anglers+attack+proposed+ban+on+snapper+fishing>

Snapper fishing ban? Hundreds turn out to protest

Ludmilla Lellis, Orlando Sentinel

Nov.11, 2009

<http://www.orlandosentinel.com/news/local/volusia/os-red-snapper-grouper-ban-hearing-111209,0,1503953.story>

Anglers seeing red over proposed snapper ban

Channel 13, Orlando

Nov.12, 2009

http://www.cfnews13.com/News/Local/2009/11/11/anglers_seeing_red_over_proposed_snapper_ban.html

Anglers fear snapper ban will bring disaster

By Jim Waymer, Florida Today

Nov.12, 2009

<http://www.floridatoday.com/article/20091112/NEWS01/911120322/1006/news01/Snapper+anglers+dread+a++disaster+>

Government proposed ban on snapper fishing

By Tom Parkinson, Public Broadcasting

Nov.12, 2009

http://www.wmfe.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=9963&news_iv_ctrl=1041

Red snapper meeting could get snippy

First Coast News - Jacksonville

Nov.12, 2009

<http://www.firstcoastnews.com/news/local/news-article.aspx?storyid=148028&catid=3>

Blogs

Florida Sportsman

<http://forums.floridasportsman.com/forum/conservation-front/letter-writing-bottom-line-sa-red-snapper>

Csplash.com

<http://cplash.com/post/End-Overfishing-Save-Ten-species-of-fish-in-US-waters462.html>