

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 11, 2024

The Honorable Richard Spinrad
Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere & NOAA Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Room 5128
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Administrator Spinrad,

We write today to express our concerns about the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) recently proposed Fisheries Interim Measures for Red Snapper, and Announcement of the 2024 Red Snapper Fishing Seasons in South Atlantic Federal Waters.¹ This interim measure would reduce the recreational fishing season for red snapper along the South Atlantic coastline to a single day on July 12, 2024.

NOAA's continued failure to provide reasonable access to the highly abundant red snapper fishery is undermining the interests and economic well-being of our coastal and fishing communities. Each of our congressional districts boast vibrant recreational fishing industries that are integral to our local economies. We are deeply concerned that NOAA's rule unnecessarily limits fishing opportunities, and directly threatens the livelihoods of our recreational fishermen, local businesses, and the broader tourism industry. Based on the available data, this decision appears to be unjustified.

NOAA's own March 2021 South Atlantic Red Snapper Stock Assessment shows that the red snapper fishery is at record abundance.² Recruitment of young fish into the population has been at unprecedentedly high levels for several years in a row, and rebuilding continues ahead of schedule. The age structure of the stock also continues to improve as more older and larger fish are documented. While the fishery is classified as undergoing overfishing due to high recreational discard estimates, these estimates are highly uncertain (especially in light of the pilot study that suggests recreational fishing effort is overestimated by NOAA Fisheries³) and until recently, have not been considered suitable by NOAA Fisheries for use in management

¹ Fisheries, N. (2024, June 11). *NOAA Fisheries is implementing interim measures for Red Snapper, and announcing the 2024 Red Snapper Fishing seasons in South Atlantic Federal Waters.*
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/bulletin/noaa-fisheries-implementing-interim-measures-red-snapper-and-announcing-2024-red>

² SEDAR. 2021. SEDAR 73 South Atlantic Red Snapper Stock Assessment Report. SEDAR, North Charleston SC. 194 pp. available online at: <http://sedarweb.org/sedar-73>

decisions. With this in mind, it is difficult to believe that South Atlantic red snapper fishery is in trouble.

Given all the real-world evidence of a highly abundant fishery, we strongly believe that this regulatory intervention to reduce harvest is unnecessary. Scientists and anglers widely recognize that the red snapper stock is more abundant currently than at any point since the fishery has been managed. NOAA's actions to reduce the recreational red snapper season to a mere 24 hours does not align with the public's understanding of the health of the fishery, leading many fishermen to have a lack of trust in the administration's decision-making ability.

Going forward, we recommend that NOAA works to foster communication with affected communities, and we recommend that NOAA hosts town hall meetings in each South Atlantic coastal congressional district in which any proposed rules or interim measures would impact. Such events would allow residents, fishermen, and other stakeholders to engage directly with NOAA, voice their concerns, and understand the rationale behind proposed regulations.

To this end, we urge NOAA to reconsider enacting its rule and to increase its efforts to collaborate with state agencies, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, local stakeholders, and the fishing community in order to establish a commonsense approach to managing the red snapper stock.

We thank you for your attention to our correspondence, and we request a written response to this important matter no later than 5:00 PM on July 17, 2024. Your timely response is crucial in addressing the concerns of our coastal and fishing communities.

Sincerely,



Russell Fry
Member of Congress



Bruce Westerman
Member of Congress

³ Evaluating Measurement Error in the MRIP Fishing Effort Survey, NOAA Fisheries Service, Office of Science and Technology, May 2023



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Member of Congress



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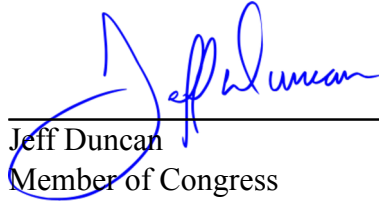
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