



## United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

May 10, 2011

Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D.  
Administrator  
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Administrator Lubchenco:

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) recently released a final rule adjusting the Total Allowable Catch for Red Snapper in the Gulf of Mexico. The increase of the commercial and recreational quotas for red snapper is good news. However, the news of the shortest season on record of only 48 days is simply unacceptable.

The Gulf of Mexico has four of the top seven fishing ports in the country by weight, and eight of the top twenty by economic value. This resource translates to almost \$50 billion in economic output every year and hundreds of thousands of jobs. As we have seen in the wake of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, fishing in the Gulf of Mexico is much more than simply a treasured pastime. It is a way of life, an economic driver, and it provides high-quality healthy seafood for the nation. Unpredictable closures and ever-shortening seasons cripple the economy of fishery-driven coastal communities.

During the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration undertook substantial efforts at data collection and timely analyses, successfully turning around data often times in one week. Recent media reports suggest that long-term effects of the spill on fish stocks remain unknown, and this further underscores the need for comprehensive data on Gulf populations.

For Gulf fishermen, the disaster is not over and the losses continue. Just as many of these fishers are trying to recover from the closures related to the oil spill, they now must contend with the shortest season to date. Specifically, in 2010, over a million pounds of recreational red snapper quota went unused. Indications are that red snapper stocks in the Gulf are rebounding and the fish are getting larger. Fishermen should not be punished because a stock is rebuilding by having a shortened season.

By the time NMFS assesses the landings data, the recreational season will be over. As an alternative, we would urge NMFS to evaluate landings data three weeks into the season to

determine whether the season may be extended. It is our belief that accurate, robust, timely science and data is necessary for appropriate fishery management that will ensure both sustainable fisheries and a vibrant fishing industry.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Bill Nelson

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