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Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance Statement on Red Snapper Data Calibrations

The [Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance](#) today released the following statement on today's Final Rule implementing Red Snapper Data Calibrations and Harvest Levels:

Today, NOAA Fisheries issued a Final Rule that implements a “common currency” for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico and increases the annual catch limit (ACL) by approximately 8%.

The Shareholders' Alliance thanks NOAA Fisheries for implementing a long overdue private angler red snapper “common currency” – where Gulf state private angler data are directly comparable to each other and to NOAA Fisheries' data – and taking an important step toward bringing the recreational red snapper fishery closer to compliance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). This deliberative process involved extensive analysis and repeated communications with the Gulf states, having been flagged as an issue more than five years ago.

Since then, the Gulf States have been managing the red snapper private angler sector and collecting catch data with five different state-specific

surveys. However, these different surveys are not directly comparable since there isn't a standardized way to count fish between the states and the data NOAA Fisheries collects. In other words, it's like comparing apples to oranges to bananas.

This lack of a "common-currency" has led to the private angler sector exceeding its ACL by 2 million pounds since 2018. This serial overharvesting happened as the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) failed to develop and approve a viable solution in a timely manner and ignored the advice from NOAA Fisheries' General Counsel that a lack of "common currency" was a violation of MSA.

But these overages have not been paid back as required by law; so once again, private angler overfishing – driven by and shrouded in a lack of "common currency" – is being tolerated and excused. This results in harm to the stock, which, in turn, harms commercial fishing business and our ability to feed the nation.

To this point – the red snapper stock is telling us it's in decline: the NOAA Fisheries bottom longline survey confirms this, and over 40 commercial and charter fishermen have told the Gulf Council as much based on their experience on the water. They are having to fish harder, travel farther, set more gear, and stay at sea longer to catch the same amount of red snapper they did even just a few years ago. It's frustrating to see this trend after everything commercial and charter fishermen have sacrificed to get this fishery back to healthy level.

Because there was no common currency or calibration and because we are seeing troubling trends on the water, the Shareholders' Alliance cannot support the part of this rule that increases the red snapper ACL. We wish we could. Commercial fishermen and fishing businesses throughout the Gulf could use the additional fish as seafood consumers in this country have an increased its appetite for seafood - including red snapper. We wish the stock was healthy enough to sustain this extra pressure. But it's not.

We cannot, in good faith, support an increase at this time when there are so many warning flags that this stock is in need of more protection.

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The Shareholders' Alliance is the largest organization of commercial snapper and grouper fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico. We work hard to ensure that our fisheries are sustainably managed so our fishing businesses can thrive and our fishing communities can exist for future generations. We are the harvesters that provide much of the American public with a reliable source of domestically caught wild Gulf seafood, and we do this through a philosophy that sustainable seafood and profitable fishing businesses depend on healthy fish populations.

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