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Managers Ignore Commercial Fishermen, Recommend Risky Red Snapper Quota Increase

The [Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance](#) today issued the following statement on the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's [recommendation](#) to increase red snapper quotas against the advice of commercial and charter fishermen throughout the Gulf of Mexico:

When the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) met in Corpus Christi last week, commercial and charter fishermen from Texas to Florida packed the meeting room and were unified around a single message – *we are seeing warning signs that red snapper have started to decline*. Their ask was simple: please don't increase the red snapper quota right now.

More than 40 small fishing business owners, whose livelihoods and communities depend on healthy red snapper stocks, gave emotional testimony for nearly four hours. These fishermen were worried about the government increasing fishing pressure at a time when the red snapper stock is telling us that it is in trouble - reliable fishing spots are holding fewer red snapper than they used to, red snapper average sizes are getting smaller, and many fishermen are

having to go farther offshore to catch the same the same amount of red snapper they were catching closer to shore just a few years ago.

Despite all these warnings, the Gulf Council – led by advocates for wealthy private recreational anglers and their well-funded lobbying organizations – decided to ignore the experiences of conservation-minded commercial fishing businessmen and women, and instead voted to increase the red snapper quota by more than 1.2 million pounds.

The only Gulf Council members that listened to our concerns about an expansion of fishing effort at this time were the only truly commercial representative and the only charter/for-hire representative; they opposed this quota increase out of an abundance of caution. Thank you for doing the right thing.

To be clear – it's not that commercial fishermen don't *want* the fish (as some recreational activists on the Gulf Council intentionally and repeatedly mischaracterized), it's that *the fishery can't sustain this extra fishing pressure right now*.

It's not often that commercial fishermen oppose increases in quotas but we seem to have to do it repeatedly in the Gulf of Mexico. We were in this same position six years ago when commercial and charter fishermen opposed increasing red grouper quotas because red grouper were getting harder and harder to catch. Similar to last week, in 2016 the Gulf Council chose short term profits over long term sustainability, ignored our warning signs, and increased the Gulf-wide red grouper quota by more than 2 million pounds.

What transpired next had catastrophic impacts on the fishery that are still resonating today – an influx of new, young red grouper fishermen, many of whom reside in southwest Florida, entered the fishery to access this newfound quota. They then saw NOAA Fisheries rapidly slash their access two years later by nearly 5 million pounds (to one of the lowest levels on record) when managers realized they had made the wrong decision in 2016. Whoops. Now these young fishermen's – and everyone's – grouper businesses are struggling to survive and red grouper will now take years to recover because the Gulf Council ignored the warning signs.

This dissociation with reality is becoming a chronic problem with this supposedly "fair and balanced" management body. The U.S. Secretary of Commerce has whittled away commercial fishing representation on the Gulf Council since 2017; in fact, commercial representatives have been replaced with

recreational advocates *twice in the last two years*, leaving commercial fishermen with only one single representative out of seventeen voting members that has experience with commercial fisheries under the Gulf Council's jurisdiction.

If the Gulf Council and the Biden Administration are going to replace commercial fishing representatives with recreational advocates, ignore the environmental warning signs, and increase fishing pressure at a time when fish are becoming harder to catch, we will hold you accountable for your actions. You need to own the very real consequences of your decisions as they harm our businesses, our communities, and the health of the resources of the Gulf of Mexico.

Red snapper are declining, fishing businesses are losing money, and the hard working men and women of the Gulf of Mexico are rapidly losing faith that the Biden Administration is truly committed to conservation and protecting small family fishing businesses.

The Gulf's seafood industry - and the millions of American seafood consumers we serve - deserve better.

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Media Contact:

Ashford Rosenberg, Policy Director, Shareholders' Alliance
901-828-4343
ashford@shareholdersalliance.org

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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