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Biden Administration Gulf Council Appointments Bring On-the-Water Perspective - Still Falls Short of Adding Commercial Representation.

The [Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance](#) (Shareholders' Alliance) today issued the following statement on the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) [appointments](#) by the Secretary of Commerce, which represented a small step in the right direction towards fair representation:

After three years the Secretary of Commerce and Biden Administration appear to be turning an ear to the needs of fishing communities, and have finally taken a small step in populating the Gulf Council with individuals who make a living on the water by appointing Captain Ed Walker to the Florida/At-Large Seat.

The Gulf Council was originally designed and successfully operated as a balanced, stakeholder-driven management body that fairly represented the interests of all fishing sectors. It was balanced with both recreational and commercial representation, fish stocks were rebuilding, management was effective, and commercial fishermen had profitable and stable businesses.

Over the last several years, the Gulf Council shifted solely towards the interests of one group as appointments were dominated by recreational representatives. This decline in balance continued until the commercial sector was dwindled down to merely **one** representative out of seventeen seats, despite the hundreds of thousands of jobs, \$8 million in landings revenue, and \$4 billion in seafood sales generated by the industry across the

Gulf Coast ([NOAA Fisheries Economics of the United States 2020](#)). Such a significant cultural and economic impact should not be ignored in management.

Many critical Gulf of Mexico stocks are in a nosedive – red grouper, gag grouper, and greater amberjack quotas have all been slashed by up to 80% over the last two years because the populations are so low, due in part to the shockingly high number of fish that are discarded by the recreational sector, often dead or dying. Red snapper, the remarkable stock that bounced back faster than anyone expected, are now in decline, due to mismanagement of the private recreational sector and their chronic discarding of fish. All these actions took place while the Gulf Council was dominated by a private angler supermajority.

By appointing Captain Ed Walker to the Gulf Council, the Administration has taken a small first step in bringing someone to the table that makes a living on the water. Captain Walker is a qualified candidate with a unique perspective through his experience as a dual-permitted charter/for-hire and commercial captain. However, this still leaves the Gulf Council with only one seat out of seventeen with full-time experience in federally managed commercial fisheries. **One.**

This still falls far short of “fair”, as required by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. While the appointment of Captain Walker is a step in the right direction, we have a long way to go in restoring the voice of coastal communities who are directly impacted by the decisions the Gulf Council makes.

It is imperative the Gulf Council return to fair, balanced, and impartial representation that prioritizes science-based management and conservation. Diverse perspectives and expertise are essential in promoting effective resource management and decision making. This year, thousands of constituents called on the Biden Administration to right the ship. But recent appointment decisions reveal this Administration’s disregard for these principles, and the needs of coastal communities, commercial fishermen, and the consumers who rely on them for seafood. We are encouraged by the appointment of Captain Ed Walker and extend our congratulations to him, but this still fails to meet the needs of healthy fisheries and healthy fishing communities.

The fight for balance is ongoing. We will continue to call for fair representation for commercial fishing families. We will not stop until our voices are heard, and composition of the Gulf Council reflects the makeup of the men and women on the water – the people who work relentlessly to put seafood on everyone’s dinner tables deserve a say in the management process which directly affects their livelihoods.

At the Shareholders’ Alliance, we believe that the appointment of diverse perspectives and expertise is essential in promoting effective resource management and decision making. We

will continue to fight for the interests of commercial fishermen until we are able to achieve reasonable diversity of sectors on the Gulf Council. Today marks the first step in the right direction.

The Shareholders' Alliance continues to be committed to participating in the Gulf Council process, and advocate for management that is rooted in science, prioritizes the health of the resources, and ensures fish populations are robust enough to support the men and women who make their living on the water. We stand ready to work with Captain Ed Walker, and all Gulf Council members, to meet these objectives, so that our fisheries are managed in a sustainable manner.

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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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