

May 26, 2023

The Honorable Gina Raimondo
Secretary of Commerce
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Raimondo,

On behalf of the 17 undersigned commercial and federal charter/for-hire fishing organizations in the Gulf of Mexico, we write to strongly encourage you to rebalance and diversify the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) with commercial and charter/for-hire representatives.

Collectively, the commercial and charter/for-hire fishing industry generates approximately \$9 billion in economic value.^{1,2} We provide tens of thousands of jobs that generate approximately \$2.5 billion in income to women and men in coastal communities throughout the Gulf of Mexico.

Despite this significant economic footprint, the Gulf Council currently has only one member with experience in the federal fisheries managed by the Gulf Council (and zero active federally-permitted commercial fishermen) and only one member of the federal charter/for-hire community.

Yet, between appointed Gulf Council members and the Gulf state representatives, the advocates for private recreational anglers have approximately two-thirds of the votes on this stakeholder body. By contrast, advocates for the commercial and charter/for-hire sectors have only a small percentage of the votes. The Gulf Council should reflect the Gulf fishing communities, with an appropriate balance between recreational and commercial sectors, as required by law.

This private angler supermajority voting block drives many Gulf Council decisions that inhibit conservation and rebuilding, impose harm on commercial and charter/for-hire fishermen, and hinder meaningful process on management reform. A supermajority that favors private recreational interests undermines confidence in the system and is not fair to the other participants in the fishery. That is why the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act says the Secretary “shall, to the extent practicable, ensure a fair and balanced apportionment, on a rotating or other basis, of the active participants (or their representatives) in the commercial and recreational fisheries under the jurisdiction of the Council.”³ Congress required that balance in law. NOAA and the Department of Commerce should recognize the importance of that legal standard to ensure that the Gulf Council’s membership reflects the full range of private angler, charter/for-hire, and commercial sectors that all depend upon Gulf fisheries.

The working men and women of the Gulf of Mexico - and the hundreds of coastal communities we support between Key West, Florida and Port Isabell, Texas - are not sufficiently represented on the Gulf Council and we call on you to address this imbalance.

¹ NOAA. 2023. Fisheries Economics of the US. 2020.

² Posadas, B. [Charter Boats For-Hire in the United States and Gulf of Mexico Region.](#)

³ 16 U.S.C. § 1852(b)(2)(B).

A truly balanced Gulf Council would showcase a diversity in fishery sectors including more commercial and charter/for-hire fishermen work in and rely on the federal fisheries managed by the Gulf Council. Having only one of each on this seventeen-member voting body undermines its efficacy and disenfranchises the working men and women in the Gulf of Mexico seafood industry who have small businesses to run, families to feed, seafood and fishing access to provide, and coastal communities to support.

To that end, we strongly encourage you to rebalance and diversify the Gulf Council with commercial fishermen and charter/for-hire fishermen in 2023, and ensure fair balance moving forward.

Thank you,
The Undersigned Commercial and Charter/For-Hire Fishing Organizations



Captain Dale Woodruff
President
Alabama Charter Fishing
Association



Captain Jim Green
President
Charter Fishermen's Association.



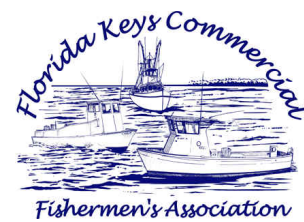
Captain Jason Klosterman
Vice President
Destin Charter Boat
Association



Captain Jim Zurbrick
President
Fish for America, USA



Captain Dylan Hubbard
President
Florida Guides Association



Captain Bill Kelly
Executive Director
Florida Keys Commercial
Fishermen's Association



Captain Acy Cooper
President
Louisiana Shrimp Association



Captain Glen Brooks
President
Gulf Fishermen's Association



Eric Brazer
Deputy Director
Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish
Shareholders' Alliance



Jason DeLaCruz
Executive Director
Gulf Wild™



Captain Bob Zales II
President
National Association of Charterboat
Operators



Alexis Meschelle
Executive Director
Organized Fishermen of
Florida

**PANAMA CITY BOATMEN
ASSOCIATION**

Captain Mark Kelly
Panama City Boatmen
Association



Eugene Raffield
President
Southeastern Fisheries Association



Captain Bob Zales, II
Fisheries Management
Consultant
Southern Offshore Fishing
Association



John Williams
Executive Director
Southern Shrimp Alliance



Andrea Hance
Executive Director

