



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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GULF COAST LEGISLATORS OPPOSE CATCH SHARE PLAN Rep. Southerland (FL) Spearheads Efforts To Protect Open Access

Little more than one week after 19 members of the House of Representatives requested language be included in the 2012 appropriations bill to help restrict use of funds for development of new catch share programs in the New England, Mid Atlantic and South Atlantic regions, 25 legislators have responded in kind to help protect access in the Gulf of Mexico.

Spearheaded by Rep. Steve Southerland (R-FL), the bipartisan letter sent to House leadership this week sends a clear and concise message to Congress that coastal legislators on both sides of the aisle are not happy with NOAA Fisheries attempt to respond to fisheries management issues through privatization schemes which limit fishing participation. "Just as Members who have Atlantic coastlines in their districts desire to keep new job-killing catch share programs from being implemented, so too do we, the undersigned Gulf Coast members," the letter reads.

"We are alarmed by the crippling job losses experienced along Atlantic Coast as a result of these catch share programs. A similar disaster can be avoided in the Gulf of Mexico by preventing the establishment of new programs in our region until several conditions have been met, including requiring the use of better scientific research and data collection from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), and economic impact statements. These tools are necessary to accurately measure the economic impact of catch share programs and we believe it is in the best interests of our coastal industries to restrict funding for catch share programs until these common sense conditions are met," the letter continued. The full letter can be found at www.joinrfa.org/Press/GOM_CongressCatchShare.pdf.

"I appreciate the support of the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) in working to eliminate the job-crushing impact of new catch share programs on our Gulf Coast fisheries, and I remain committed to doing all I can to empower our coastal industries to grow despite tough economic times," Rep. Southerland said today in an official statement.

RFA executive director Jim Donofrio said the Congressional response to protecting open access is very much appreciated by RFA members and coastal allies. "I'm pleased to see such overwhelming support from both sides of the aisle to protect open access fisheries, and I hope that we can rally up this much support to help get the federal fisheries fixed to allow anglers to continue to access rebuilt fish stocks."

RFA said the 2006 reauthorization of the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act included language which has allowed NOAA Fisheries to steamroll excessive restrictions on coastal fishing communities through use of arbitrary rebuilding deadlines and statutory definitions. Meanwhile, Congressional mandates placed upon NOAA Fisheries to fix the science in a time-specific deadline have not been met.

"We encourage House members to get together, collectively, to fix the problems with the Magnuson Stevens Act to help keep our folks fishing on healthy fish stocks, and stop this ridiculous effort to cap fishing participation by trading away our coastal resource to a privileged few," Donofrio said, adding that he hopes to work with these same legislators in supporting HR3061, the Flexibility and Access in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act of 2011.

Those signing the letter noted they are pleased to see the House Appropriations Committee responding to coastal concerns by cutting catch shares funding to \$21.956 million, roughly half of the 2011 fiscal year budget, but noted that that reduction will not prevent NOAA from imposing new job-destroying catch share programs in the Gulf of Mexico. "Therefore, we respectfully request that you not only include the language requested by our colleagues in the final FY 2012 CJS bill, but also that you would add the Gulf of Mexico to this language."

Calling it a “great letter” Capt. Bob Zales, II, president of the National Association of Charterboat Operators (NACO) and a member of the RFA board of directors said that new groups sprouting up in the region in recent months claiming to represent fishermen are simply puppets of larger non-government organizations like Environmental Defense Fund, which has become much more apparent to legislators in the Gulf region.

“It’s clear that the vast majority of the fishermen, recreational and commercial alike, have gotten this message across to House members that we don’t want to see any more catch share funding,” Zales said, adding “We are very appreciative of Representative Southerland’s stand for fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico.”

“NACO and RFA have worked arm in arm on this, when you talk bipartisanship this is clearly an example of numbers,” said Zales adding that NACO’s membership in the Gulf of Mexico alone numbers close to 1,000. “Numbers matter most, and Environmental Defense isn’t fooling anyone at this point with their claims of membership support from within the fishing industry.”

An email alert sent from Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) to its supporters last week warned that the congressional leaders who were actively working to slow the spread of catch share programs on behalf of their fishing constituents were undertaking “a desperate move to get around the usual process of making a law by banning catch shares under the cover of darkness, without any public debate or even a vote,” warning that catch shares would protect “disadvantaged regions of our country even where local fishermen and others are eager to adopt them.”

“It’s a ridiculous work of fiction,” Donofrio said about the EDF doomsday warnings. “Here we have Congress reacting to the will of the people, while EDF and its well-heeled ideologues are spinning a yarn about how individual, privatized ownership of fish stocks is going to help save the poor and the downtrodden. Catch shares will make a handful of people very wealthy by reducing fishing participation and commoditizing our public resources, but it could very well bankrupt our coastal fishing communities in the long run.”

House members signing on to help stem the infusion of catch share funding along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts include Rep. Southerland, Rep. Walter Jones (R-NC), Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA), Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ), Rep. John Mica (R-FL), Rep. Sandy Adams (R-FL), Rep. Allen West (R-FL), Rep. Tom Rooney (R-FL), Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Rep. Tim Griffin (R-AR), Rep. Bill Posey (R-FL), Rep. Jeff Duncan (R-SC), Rep. Steven Palazzo (R-MS), Rep. Joe Wilson (R-SC), Rep. John Fleming (R-LA), Rep. Jeff Landry (R-LA), Rep. David Rivera (R-FL), Rep. Ander Crenshaw (R-FL), Rep. Jon Runyan (R-NJ), Rep. Don Young (R-AK), Rep. Mick Mulvaney (R-SC), Rep. Jeff Miller (R-FL), Rep. Vern Buchanan (R-FL), Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL), Rep. Frank Guinta (R-NH), Rep. Richard Nugent (R-FL), Rep. Mike Ross (D-AR), Rep. Rodney Alexander (R-LA), Rep. John Tierney (D-MA), Rep. Frank Guinta (R-NH), Rep. Timothy Bishop (D-NY), Rep. Joe Courtney (D-CT), Rep. Mike McIntyre (D-NC), Rep. Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ), Rep. Peter King (R-NY), Rep. Chris Smith (R-NJ) and Rep. William Keating (D-MA).

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The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. RFA’s Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our Nation’s saltwater fisheries. For more information, call 888-JOIN-RFA or visit www.joinrfa.org.