



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

5724 N. Route 9, New Gretna, NJ 08224

P: 888-564-6732 F: 609-294-3812

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Contact: Jim Hutchinson, Jr.

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888 564-6732

OBAMA ADMINISTRATION SHUTS DOWN ANOTHER HEALTHY FISHERY “Fairy Tale Of Fisheries Management Is Destroying Our Industry”

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) was recently notified by NMFS Southeast Regional Administrator Roy Crabtree that a 4,800-square mile fishing ban is on its way for South Atlantic anglers. A final rule to implement controversial Amendment 17A will likely be published in mid-November, but the U.S. Department of Commerce’s announcement will ultimately establish a closed area extending from southern Georgia to Cape Canaveral, FL affecting angler harvest and possession of all snapper-grouper species.

The fishing closure affects areas with depths between 98 and 240 feet and is being implemented as part of the Amendment 17-A which indefinitely bans all bottom-fishing for both the commercial and recreational sectors. A blanket ban on red snapper harvest adopted as a temporary measure last year remains in effect in a 200-nautical mile zone off the entire Southeast coast.

According to the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA), the closure is based purely on flawed science, inaccurate harvest data and overly restrictive federal fisheries language written into the Magnuson Stevens Fisheries Management and Conservation Act. “There is no biological problem with this fishery,” said RFA Executive Director Jim Donofrio, “this is a management and legislative problem, not a fishery issue.”

“This fishery is rebuilding and that’s not even a debate for our fisheries experts, but because it’s not rebuilding fast enough according to Magnuson, the government has to shut down access to healthy fisheries,” Donofrio said. “How can you defend a law which is so punitive to a uniquely American industry, a law which denies everyday anglers access to a public resource.”

The plan is forecast to cost area fishermen millions of dollars in lost catch, not only in snapper but grouper, sea bass and other harvests from dozens of species commonly caught through bottom fishing.

“It’s going to put a lot of people of business,” said Capt. Bob Zales, II President of the National Association of Charterboat Operators (NACO). “You’ll probably have a lot of small family owned charter operators going out of business, not to mention tackle shops, restaurants, marinas, hotels and every other business that relies on fishing and tourism,” he added. According to Zales, who’s also a member of the RFA national board of directors, it would be one thing if the fishery was in trouble. However, he explains the strict requirements under Magnuson prevent any flexibility within the fisheries management process to allow fishermen to continue fishing.

“The Magnuson Stevens Act dictates that all fisheries are managed by a one-size-fits-all approach, and that just doesn’t work,” Zales said, adding “Cinderella’s slipper doesn’t fit on every foot, and this fairy tale of fisheries management is destroying our industry.”

Fellow RFA board member Tom Putnam of Half-Hitch Bait and Tackle in Panama City said he’s concerned for his business associates on the East Coast of Florida and Georgia, and said restrictive measures on the Gulf Coast have had a terrible impact on the recreational fishing industry there. “It’s totally changed our business, with snapper season only being 54 days it cut our business by over 30%,” Putnam said, adding “I can’t imagine what a total closure will do to our friends on the Atlantic Coast.”

After visiting the Fort Lauderdale Boat Show this week, Putnam said there's a lot of concern in the boating industry now because of these fisheries management issues. They're making it where people don't want to buy boats," he said of the government restrictions, adding he's also concerned about the next steps proposed for the Gulf grouper fishery as well.

In June, the RFA submitted comments to the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) asking that its members not take official action on Amendment 17A based on evidence that the fishery was healthy and rebuilding. "As we said at the time, you can't use fatally flawed harvest data to make overfished and overfishing determinations," Donofrio said.

Ongoing fishing bans implemented by the Department of Commerce including that for red snapper and black sea bass in the Mid-Atlantic have kept RFA and allies busily lobbying Congress during the past 3 years since Magnuson was reauthorized with more restrictive statutory definitions. Donofrio said Congressional efforts to counteract these overly-restrictive measures including legislation sponsored by Rep. Frank Pallone to add flexibility to federal rebuilding timelines (HR1584) and Rep. John Mica (HR3307) to limit the authority of the Secretary to prohibit red snapper fishing in the South Atlantic without improved studies have not moved fast enough to protect fishermen.

While the Pallone bill had a Senate companion bill sponsored by Sen. Charles Schumer (S1255), efforts to find a Florida Senator to sponsor a companion piece to the Mica bill addressing red snapper closures were unsuccessful.

"This new proposed closure is evidence that the priority for the entire fishing industry must be fisheries reform and an overhaul of Magnuson," Donofrio said. "We need a law that allows for access, rebuilding and sustainability, which can all be achieved without complete closures, and we need to prioritize these efforts after the November 2 elections."

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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.