

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 29, 2017

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Mr. Secretary:

After the conclusion of a historically brief 2017 federal Gulf of Mexico red snapper season, we thank you for working with the five Gulf states to craft and implement a consensus plan to align state and federal red snapper management in the Gulf. This agreement yielded 39 additional days of recreational fishing in federal waters this year. We respectfully request that you build on this recent success by engaging with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (SAFMC) member states to thoroughly analyze all available fisheries data, including state data, and ensure that anglers can once again enjoy red snapper fishing opportunities in the South Atlantic.

We cannot stress enough how important the red snapper fishery is to Florida's economy. While we appreciate SAFMC's recent efforts to potentially move towards allowing a limited harvest beginning in July 2018, the South Atlantic red snapper fishery will remain closed this year. This decision is disappointing for residents and small business owners from Jacksonville to Miami especially considering the enhanced opportunities being afforded to their peers along Florida's Gulf coast.

It is clear that excessively limiting recreational opportunities to fish for red snapper in federal waters—even as populations continue to rebound—threatens to further erode the public's trust in the federal institutions charged with science-based fisheries management decisions. In particular, there remains considerable questions regarding the data collection and analysis used by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to determine federal season lengths. Reducing the recreational quota buffer through the use of expanded data sources and improved data collection technology could greatly ease the tensions between the public and the state and federal institutions charged with maintaining sustainable harvest opportunities. We also believe that mid-year reviews to consider extensions of federal red snapper seasons by accurately accounting for the total allowable catch and the impact of severe weather during allowed fishing days could provide additional safe and responsible fishing opportunities. We encourage you to consult with South Atlantic and Gulf states to explore these ideas and determine where consensus can be reached.

While Congress, the Department of Commerce, the councils, and states work towards a long-term solution, we respectfully request that you consider all available metrics to ensure that Floridians and visitors are not being unfairly disadvantaged by unnecessarily limited fishing opportunities in both the Gulf of Mexico and the South Atlantic. From hotels, restaurants, bait

and tackle shops, and other small businesses that rely on both commercial and recreational fishing activity, ensuring that fishery data accurately reflects the true nature of the red snapper population is essential for our coastal communities.

We thank you for your consideration of this request and look forward to further cooperation on these important issues.



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator

Sincerely,



Bill Nelson
U.S. Senator