



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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For Immediate Release
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SOUTHEAST ANGLERS SAY IT'S TIME FOR CHANGE CONGRESS MUST FIX FEDERAL FISHERIES LAW

The Flexibility in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act of 2009 currently being lobbied by the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) and their Gulf allies is receiving renewed attention in the Southeast as anglers throughout the South Atlantic and Gulf regions react to continued recreational fishing closures. On November 7, a flotilla of charter boats from the Destin Charter Boat Association in Florida formed a symbolic blockade along Florida's Destin Harbor, while simultaneous rallies were held in nearby Panama City and Mexico Beach, and also in Orange Beach, Alabama. Additionally, both the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council have seen a huge increase in meeting attendance as fishermen and environmental activists have squared off over recreational fishing closures of amberjack and red snapper.

Rally organizer Mike Eller told one Florida-based newspaper earlier this month "We want to make sure public officials understand the impact that poorly made decisions have had on the economic situation. People are fired up because what's been done is not fair. It's not right." According to Eller, the closures are not just local problems, but occurring up and down the Atlantic Coast. "The only fix is help from congressional leaders," Eller said, echoing the RFA's rallying cry of the past 11 months.

In a press release issued back in April, the RFA said "In response to the South Atlantic Fisheries Management Council's (SAFMC) decision to close the red snapper fishery, a groundswell of grassroots support has united the recreational and commercial fishing communities, two distinct groups that are often on opposite sides of the fisheries management spectrum. At issue to Southeast coastal fishermen is the use of arbitrary rebuilding timeframes and NOAA Fisheries' refusal to use all available science in fisheries management decisions."

"The situation with red snapper clearly illustrates the need for flexibility to manage rebuilding and rebuilt stocks, something the RFA has been saying all along," said Jim Donofrio, Executive Director of the national sportfishing organization. "To impose such economic hardships on coastal economies based on arbitrary deadlines and outdated abundance estimates when the stocks are actually at abundance levels never seen before is inexcusable," Donofrio added.

On March 18, U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ), along with fellow Representatives John Adler (D-NJ), Henry Brown, Jr. (R-SC), Ginny Brown-Waite (R-FL), Barney Frank (D-MA), Walter B. Jones, Jr. (R-NC), Patrick Kennedy (D-RI), Frank LoBiondo (D-NJ), Mike McIntyre (D-NC), Michael Michaud (D-ME), Solomon Ortiz (D-TX) and John Tierney (D-MA), introduced the *Flexibility in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act of 2009 (HR 1584)*. Co-sponsors who've pledged support include Rob Andrews (D-NJ), Timothy Bishop (D-NY), Allen Boyd (D-FL), Joe Courtney (D-CT), Peter King (R-NY), Rob Wittman (R-VA), Jo Bonner (R-AL), John Mica (R-FL), Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Carol Shea-Porter (D-NH), Clifford Stearns (R-FL) and Donna Christensen (D-VI). Following a letter-writing campaign by RFA-NY chapter members in early April, leading Democratic Senator Charles Schumer of New York announced his Senate version of the bill (S.1255). Currently, the Senate bill to correct the flaws in the Magnuson Stevens Act (MSA) has no co-sponsors.

According to Donofrio, MSA's requirements that all marine fish stocks must be rebuilt to historic levels simultaneously and within rigid, arbitrary timeframes is reckless, unrealistic and without regard for coastal communities and recreational fishermen.

"Many anti-fishing environmental groups who have lobbied against our efforts want to see the waters off of Florida in a condition more pristine than when Ponce de Leon sailed the coast, regardless of the negative impact on fishing businesses and coastal economies," Donofrio said. "This is not a reality. It is patently unfair to hold the recreational fishing industry to an unrealistic standard not expected by any other industry in the US," he added.

On June 2, the RFA sent an official letter Florida Sen. Bill Nelson (D-FL) calling for an immediate moratorium on any closures to the recreational harvest of red snapper until better scientific analysis can be conducted. "The socioeconomic importance of recreational fishing demands that the management of our nation's marine resources successfully balances the needs of the marine industry, access for anglers and long-term conservation objectives for the resource," said Jim Donofrio, Executive Director of the RFA. "The current management of red snapper in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico has failed."

RFA asked Sen. Nelson to consider a two-pronged approach to work on behalf of coastal communities, addressing an immediate moratorium on recreational closures, while simultaneously urging support for the Flexibility in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act of 2009. "Recent amendments to the our nation's primary fishery management law, P.L. 109-479, (MSA) are prompting unprecedented restrictive regulations in many of the most important recreational fisheries in the Gulf and South Atlantic," Donofrio continued. "RFA contends MSA can be amended to allow a balance of conservation and access at the same time."

In July, U.S. Rep. John Mica (R-FL) picked up the ball introduced legislation to place on hold a proposed ban on red snapper fishing while directing the Secretary of Commerce to conduct a study of the population of red snapper and to limit the authority of the Secretary to move forward with any interim rule that prohibits red snapper fishing until the study is reported to Congress. "Before we halt fishing, it is important that we secure accurate information on the health and status of the current red snapper population," Rep. Mica stated, adding "Sport and commercial fishing is becoming an endangered activity. This legislation could also prevent more job losses during this time of economic uncertainty."

More than 150 groups, organizations and businesses have signed on with the RFA in building support for HR 1584/S 1255. Southeast fishing groups calling for a limited flexibility amendment to MSA include the Cooperative of Gulf Fishermen, Destin Charter Boat Association, Fishing Rights Alliance, Indian River Charter Boat Association, Marco Island Charter Captains Association, Panama City Boatmen Association, Pensacola Charterboat Association and the South Atlantic Charterboat Association. National groups lending support include National Association of Charterboat Operators and the Marine Retailers Association of America (visit www.joinrfa.org/Press/FlexibilitySupporters_061809.pdf).

RFA has been at the forefront in pushing for "flexibility" in the federal fisheries law since the reauthorized version was signed into law in 2007. Learn more in this 2008 national article in Power & Motor Yacht magazine at www.powerandmotoryacht.com/sportfishing/recreational-fishing-alliance. Read more RFA press at <http://www.joinrfa.org/Press.asp>.

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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.

*The RFA 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.*