



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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April 29, 2009
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Conservation Group Offers “Freedom to Fish” To Highest Bidder New Management Approach Would Sell Off Recreational Access

Galloway, NJ - In what can best be described as a “pay to play” version of fisheries management, the Texas-based conservation group, Coastal Conservation Association (CCA), has gone on record with a new socialized approach to managing the nation’s coastal fisheries, whereby access to the resource is offered to the highest bidder. According to Dr. Russ Nelson, Fisheries Consultant for CCA, a “free market-based approach to managing red snapper and other marine fishes” could create individual fishing quotas (IFQ) for the recreational fishing community, the same as commercial fishermen.

“IFQ programs have demonstrated some success in controlling commercial fisheries, but restrict access by the general public and necessitate difficult allocation decisions,” Nelson said in a CCA discussion paper delivered to the Gulf Council on April 10. Citing current discard mortality problems within the recreational sector, particularly with regard to the red snapper fishery, Nelson said “We are facing new, stricter control measures to assure that our annual catch doesn’t exceed the allowable level, and the recreational sector remains without an accurate means of counting the fish we catch.”

CCA’s proposed “free market-based approach” would issue individual, non-reusable tags for red snapper to account for the total allowable catch during an annual cycle. The tags would be issued for public auction every year, and those members of the public who wish to catch red snapper would make bids on the available fish tags. “Let anyone who so desires to place their best bid and distribute to the highest bidders,” Nelson’s paper stated, “bidders could be individuals, states or organizations.”

Tags would remain on individual fish until cooked and consumed, whether in a residential home or at a seafood restaurant, which CCA explains will allow all fishermen who gain access to the tags to do with the fish what they please. “Those who buy the tags can use them any way they desire – take the fish home and eat it, give them as Christmas presents, sell them, take their fish to a market and sell them,” the CCA paper continued.

The authors of the discussion paper explain that the current method of surveying recreational anglers through the Marine Recreational Fishing Statistical Survey (MRFSS) could be eliminated, since only anglers possessing tags would be allowed to fish for regulated species like red snapper, and only a certain allotment of tags would be issued during any given cycle. “It is simple and arguably the most fair and equitable approach. Every one – anglers, commercial harvesters, seafood processors, investors and conservationists would have the same opportunity to access the resource,” the CCA paper added.

Many members of the recreational fishing community fear the proposal, if put into policy, would take the common man out of fishing. “We think it is bad policy to rest fishing rights in a select few,” said Jim Hutchinson, Jr. Managing Director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA). “Such a proposal would create a fishing elite to the exclusion of the American fishing public.”

“Together with marine reserves, this plan, if implemented, would completely eliminate open-access fishing in America,” Hutchinson added. “Hopefully, the Gulf Council can squash this idea before it gains any credibility within fisheries management circles.”

“We do not intend that our natural resources shall be exploited by the few against the interests of the many. Our aim is to preserve our natural resource for the public as a whole, for the average man and the average woman who make up the body of the American people.”

- President Theodore Roosevelt.

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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.