



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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GULF LEGISLATORS ASK TO EXTEND RED SNAPPER SEASON Commerce Secretary Also Considers South Atlantic Season Opening

On June 29th, NOAA Fisheries announced that recreational anglers would get six additional days of the red snapper season (extended from July 11 closing through July 17) agreeing with the concerns spelled out below by legislators.

June 28, 2012 - Seventeen respected members of the House of Representatives signed off on a [letter to Dr. Roy Crabtree](#), the Southeast regional administrator for NOAA Fisheries in Saint Petersburg, FL, asking that the 40-day red snapper season in the Gulf of Mexico be extended due to the recent weather emergencies.

The members of Congress representing Florida, Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia, Texas, and Arkansas call the 40-day red snapper season “a window that is too short to make a living and being made shorter by the devastating summer weather.”

“We have heard from charter boat operators and private anglers in our districts who are concerned that the extensive damage caused by Tropical Storm Debby, along with the summer storms that could occur in the days ahead, will leave them with far too few days to fish,” the letter states. “With this crippling blow to our local economies, however, comes a timely opportunity for the Gulf of Mexico Fisheries Management Council to build good will with our fishermen.”

“For these reasons, we strongly request that you consider extending this year’s 40-day red snapper season until the end of July, which coincides with the peak of our tourism season,” the Representatives wrote. “We believe that this decisive action is reasonable and will go a long way toward relieving the crippling economic burden facing our fishermen and the ancillary businesses that rely on the season for increased tourism and revenue.”

The Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) praised the 17 bipartisan members of Congress who signed on to the letter to NOAA Fisheries, calling the request an emergency action well worth considering. “NOAA’s fisheries service will often shut down recreational fishing in an emergency when their marine recreational fishing statistical surveys show some drastic uptick in participation, is it too much to ask for an emergency opening considering what the NOAA weather service must admit has been a devastating week in the Gulf,” asked RFA executive director Jim Donofrio.

Anglers have already lost nearly a third of its allowable season to unfishable conditions, and RFA is hopeful that the Commerce Department will act swiftly on behalf of coastal fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico.

Several members of Congress who signed on to the letter to NOAA Fisheries were also attendees at the national fishermen’s rally in Washington DC back in March, including Florida congressmen Steve Southerland, Allen West, Gus Bilirakis and David Rivera.

“Many thanks go to Rep. Southerland and the other representatives who signed the letter requesting an extension,” said RFA board member and president of the National Association of Charterboat Operators, Capt. Bob Zales, II. “Remember these representatives come Election Day as they are working to help all of us,” Zales added.

The Congressional letter formally requests that the red snapper season be extended through the end of July, a period which coincides with the peak of the regional tourism season in the Gulf of Mexico. “We believe that this decisive action is reasonable and will go a long way toward relieving the crippling economic burden facing our fishermen and the ancillary businesses that rely on the season for increased tourism and revenue,” the Representatives noted.

“We need an emergency extension to our snapper season,” said Capt. Tom Adams of Mexico Beach Charters and chairman of the RFA’s Forgotten Coast Chapter. “We are going to miss another full week of fishing, we have already lost at least 8 days and extending it after school is back in session does very little good.” In response to Adams’ request, Dr. Crabtree said “we are looking into this.”

The Department of Commerce is already reviewing action requested by the [South Atlantic Fishery Management Council](#) (SAFMC) to lift a moratorium on Atlantic Coast red snapper, although under tightly regulated conditions. The red snapper fishery has been closed in South Atlantic federal waters since January 4, 2010 to end overfishing and rebuild the stock as required by Congress through the Magnuson-Stevens Act, though SAFMC members voted earlier this month on an emergency rule request to provide both recreational and commercial fishermen the opportunity to harvest a limited number of red snapper later this year, perhaps by early fall.

If approved by the Secretary of Commerce, the emergency rule would allow for recreational fishermen to harvest a total of 9,399 fish during three-day weekend openings, with the dates of the openings to be determined by NOAA Fisheries Service.

“The Secretary will try to make a decision on the request within 60 days,” said Dr. Crabtree in response to the SAFMC request. “Depending on publication of the final rule, fishing for red snapper could likely occur sometime in September.”

While RFA is encouraged that the acting Secretary of Commerce is considering such a measure, the angler advocacy organization is concerned that a full 60-day review period would push even limited red snapper fishing back until after the summer season. “It’s the height of the tourism season along the coast right now, and the Commerce Department should recognize that much of our coastal commerce is occurring right now,” said Donofrio.

RFA also points out that when fisheries like red snapper are closed, there is no angler access to this resource, which means no catch and release. “There are folks who think that it’s great to go fishing without taking anything home for dinner, and that’s wonderful if you have access to a particular fishery and prefer to practice safe catch and release of your fish,” Donofrio said. “However, when these seasons are closed for fish like black sea bass, gag grouper or red snapper, anglers are not allowed to target these species, and that means no fishing, none.”

“This is all about reasonable access and sound conservation, and we’re thankful that more members of Congress have been taking notice of our recreational fishing concerns over the past few years,” Donofrio added. “It’s taken a pair of national rallies in DC and a lot of individual angler feedback to congressional offices to raise the level of concern, but it is working.”

To read the full letter in support of a red snapper extension in the Gulf of Mexico, go to www.joinrfa.org/Press/RedSnapperExtensionRequest.pdf.

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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.