



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

5724 N. Route 9, New Gretna, NJ 08224

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

For Immediate Release
Contact: Jim Hutchinson, Jr.

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888 564-6732

ATLANTIC RED SNAPPER SEASON OPENS FRIDAY 12:01 A.M. Continued Legal & Congressional Pressure Leads to Limited Six Day Season

September 13, 2012 - On December 3, 2009, NOAA Fisheries announced a ban on both the recreational and commercial harvest of red snapper in South Atlantic federal waters off Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina would commence beginning January 4, 2010.

Tomorrow, that fishery will finally reopen for two consecutive weekends made up of Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, with a one fish per-person, per-day, bag limit with no minimum size limit. The South Atlantic recreational red snapper season opens at 12:01 a.m., local time, on September 14, and closes at 12:01 a.m., local time, on September 17, 2012; the season then reopens at 12:01 a.m., local time, on September 21, 2012, and closes at 12:01 a.m., local time, on September 24, 2012.

[Immediately following the 2009 closure](#), Dave Heil, a Florida-based attorney for the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) filed a lawsuit in federal court in Jacksonville seeking an emergency injunction to prevent the ban from taking effect and asking a judge to throw out the rule which created the ban. Heil and the RFA charged that the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) used improper data to drive their decision, explaining that the government already acknowledged that the data collection methodology used to make the closure determination was never intended to be used for such purposes.

The red snapper complaint filed on behalf of the RFA charged NMFS with ignoring mandates from the reauthorized Magnuson Stevens Act in 2006 to address inconsistencies within the recreational data collection process. "It is apparent that the SAFMC and the NMFS have ignored the Magnuson Stevens in passing the Interim Rule using the obviously flawed data from MRFSS," Heil said at the time.

The move by NMFS in 2009 also prompted U.S. Congressman John L. Mica (R-FL) to call the ban on red snapper fishing throughout the Southeast U.S. coast an economic disaster for the region. "During this time of economic downturn this ban will be a significant job killer and an economic blow to nearly every coastal community from North Carolina to South Florida," stated Mica.

Earlier in 2009, Rep. Mica introduced legislation that requested additional data collection before any ban was imposed; although the legislation had bipartisan support, environmental groups like Pew Environment Group and Pew-funded allies within the Marine Fish Conservation Network blocked consideration of the bill which was denied a hearing.

"They're imposing a ban with flawed data and they've refused to sit down with the industry and come up with a better management solution," Mica said.

"This ban will put thousands of marginal sport fishing tourist enterprises out of business," Rep. Mica said, adding "The timing couldn't be worse for Florida with its tourism and fishing seasons set to begin at the start of the New Year and with the economy at its worst in years."

At a NOAA sponsored tackle trade show summit held in San Diego, CA in October of 2009, Under-Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator, Jane Lubchenco told tackle industry leaders that NOAA was actively responding to the concerns expressed by recreational fishing leaders "that we don't pay enough attention to recreational fishing," summarizing her address by saying "We will be your champions."

In her first 9 months as NOAA Administrator however, the former Pew Fellowship Award winner had championed the complete recreational closure of black sea bass, amberjack and red snapper; only after an ongoing legal challenge and continued congressional pressure has that Administration come through with an extremely limited red snapper opening.

“When the National Research Council reported back to Congress that the recreational data collection methods used by NOAA Fisheries were fatally flawed, it was supposed to have made this type of arbitrary and complete closure an unnecessary over-reaction,” said RFA executive director. “Here it is almost 5 years after the date that Congress required the recreational data collection to be overhauled, our recreational fishing community is still being completely ignored by this administration.”

RFA said that NOAA Fisheries has made slight adjustments to the Marine Recreational Fishing Statistical Survey (MRFSS) and their overall recreational data collection, but the changes in no way reflect the requirements set forth by the Magnuson Stevens Act when it was reauthorized in 2006. Legislation sponsored by Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ) in 2012 and co-sponsored by Rep. Mica and 18 other bipartisan coastal legislators would’ve mandated that the National Research Council return to NOAA Fisheries for another comprehensive review of their data improvement efforts.

“Our thanks to Dave Heil for keeping up the fight to reopen this fishery, but now we have to take this fight back to Congress it seems in order to hold NMFS feet to the fire in terms of revamping the data collection and meeting the scientific standards required for a healthy and active fishery,” he added. “Congress needs to understand that their law has not been followed by our own government, and the people are the ones suffering.”

“Having six days of a red snapper fishery is good news after three years of no fishing, and we certainly hope our RFA members in the South Atlantic can make the most of the next two weekends, but this is a completely ridiculous way of running fisheries and ruining fishermen,” Donofrio said.

Scientists with the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) are asking red snapper anglers on Florida’s Atlantic Coast to save their filleted carcasses and take them to one of the participating [drop-off locations](#). The carcasses provide information on size and age composition of harvested red snapper

Georgia’s Department of Natural Resources is also gathering data on red snapper caught during the next two weekends. Anglers targeting red snapper this month can place their filleted red snapper carcass in a chest freezer located at [public fishing access points](#) along the Georgia Coast. You are also encouraged to provide information about your fishing trip by completing a brief Red Snapper Survey which can be found at www.coastalgadnr.org/RedSnapperSurvey.

In South Carolina, learn more at www.dnr.sc.gov.

The North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries is also setting up freezers at eight locations along the coast where fishermen can take their red snapper carcasses. Get more information at <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/snapper/red-snapper-collection>

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