

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 15, 2017

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

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write today to express our disappointment in the recent announcement from the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) of a three day recreational Red Snapper season. It is unacceptable. We ask that you reevaluate this decision and extend the number of days for the 2017 season.

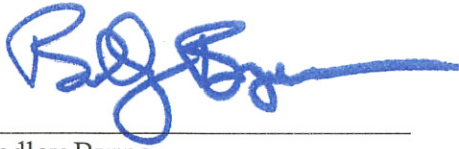
On March 21st, we wrote to you about the importance of access to adequate fishing resources in the Gulf of Mexico, and namely Red Snapper. You responded that the Red Snapper fishery is a high priority for you and your department, and therefore it is time for more than three days.

Our recreational fishermen are being penalized by NOAA for a statistical anomaly. Currently, NOAA's data says that recreational fishermen exceeded last year's quota by 129,906 pounds. However, 129,000 pounds represents less than .02 percent of the recreational quota. This decision has no bearing on the health of the stock, and there is no chance NOAA is representing the number with any degree of accuracy.

At the state level, we continue to see report numbers that do not match NMFS's data, caused by the lack of real-time information. For example, in Alabama, preliminary estimates for 2016 show a total of approximately 821,000 pounds counted by Alabama's Snapper Check Program. NOAA's estimates for the same time show approximately 2 million pounds accounted for. Mississippi's data shows the opposite problem. According to data from Mississippi's Tails n' Scales Program, almost 40,000 pounds were accounted for, yet NOAA's data claims there were zero pounds taken. It is time for recreational anglers to stop being penalized for NOAA's bad science and lack of coordination.

In short, there is serious doubt that federal data is accurately reflecting the number of Red Snapper in the Gulf. For that reason, we feel reevaluating your agency's decision for the 2017 season is warranted, and we urge you to continue working with us to develop a long-term solution to address these issues impacting our recreational fishermen and coastal communities.

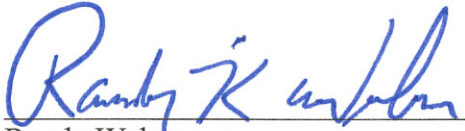
Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to hearing from you.



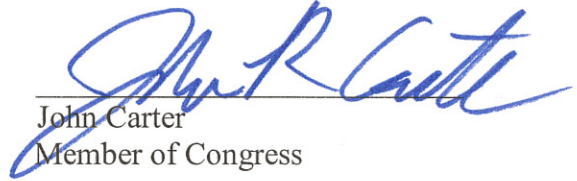
Bradley Byrne
Member of Congress



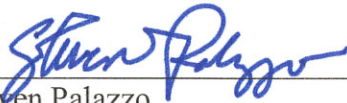
Garret Graves
Member of Congress



Randy Weber
Member of Congress



John Carter
Member of Congress



Steven Palazzo
Member of Congress