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Committee on Natural Resources
Management of Red Snapper in the gulf of Mexico Under Magnuson-Stevens Fishery
Conservation and Management Act

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My name is Herbert Malone, Jr., and I am the President and CEO of the Alabama Gulf Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau, a position I have held for more than 20 years. Our entity is the official destination marketing organization representing the cities of Orange Beach and Gulf Shores, Alabama.

Our destination welcomes over 5 million guests per year who come to enjoy the beaches, the golf and the fishing. Alabama currently has one of the largest offshore charter fleets in the entire Gulf. These charter boat owners and crew, along with the bait and tackle shops, marinas and boat repair facilities depend heavily on a steady stream of fishing customers.

Our fishing industry, in conjunction with the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, has established a 1,200-square-mile permitted artificial reef zone just off the Alabama Coast, which now contains over 17,000 artificial reefs. These reefs have cultivated habitat for the largest red snapper fishery in the Gulf. Research has shown that more recreationally caught red snapper are landed in Orange Beach, Alabama than anywhere else in the world.

The draconian decisions of the Gulf Council have resulted in an ever shortening season and have had huge negative economic impact on our family owned, small businesses. This is in spite of repeated testimony and common sense observations that the red snapper off the Alabama coast are more plentiful now than they have ever been.

Due to what are widely recognized as flawed research models, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council has continued to shorten the seasons down to the current 28 days in 2013. In 2007, the Council eliminated the spring snapper season,

moving opening day to June 1, thus the beginning of our fishing industry's economic decline. According to NOAA's report titled "Fisheries Economics of the United States, 2009," 2006 was our most productive year in coastal recreation fishing. Over the next three years, from 2006-2009, we saw a 30% decline in the number of anglers, a 35% decline in "for hire" (charter) trips, and a loss of 1,600 jobs. This loss of fishing activity was not only felt in the fishing sector of our local economy, but it was also felt in our restaurants and our hotels as well as in our local government's tax receipts.

In my position as the head of tourism, I have the opportunity to speak frequently with many of our business people, including our charter boat captains. One of our most experienced, highly regarded captains recently shared with me that he will have fished 25 of this year's 28 day season, losing only three days to the weather. Currently, he has only four charters on the books for the entire month of July, which is the most lucrative month of the year for every other sector of our tourism economy. This is a failing business model, brought about by the actions of the Gulf Council. If this management practice continues, it will mean even more negative impacts and failing businesses in our fishing industry.

By most accounts of those in the fishing business, our best hope for relief is to move the federal agency out of this resource management and turn it over to the states via a regional management plan. The economic indicators and the business statistics, coupled with the obvious health of the snapper fishery, are evidence that the current NMFS/GMFMC is also a failed model. We need your action to change that model so our businesses can go back to a red snapper season that supports viable businesses and demonstrates to our millions of visitors each year what good fisheries management can accomplish.