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October 22, 2015—U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Water, Power, and Oceans Legislative Hearing on H.R. 3094, the Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority Act

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to speak on behalf of Louisiana's fishing community before the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Water, Power, and Oceans to present information on H.R. 3094, the Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority Act.

Red snapper is an iconic American fish—it is well-known and appreciated by both residents and visitors of Louisiana and the other Gulf states, whether it is on a diner's plate at one of our fine restaurants or on the end of an angler's line. Both commercial and recreational fisheries for red snapper are extremely important to our economy and way of life. We should take great care in managing these fisheries for the benefit of all users. We should strive to have sound data to guide our management decisions and seek out solutions to ensure our fisheries are ecologically and economically sustainable.

As such, we are especially troubled with the current management of Gulf red snapper, namely management of the recreational fishery, as it continues to face challenges due to inadequate data and an inflexible, unresponsive management framework. H.R. 3094 would address these challenges. Along with our colleagues in Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) is confident the five Gulf states have the necessary tools to provide the data needed to better manage Gulf red snapper fisheries. We are able to be more receptive and responsive to the wants and needs of all of our constituents while still addressing Gulf-wide conservation goals.

There are several misconceptions about the intentions and impacts of H.R. 3094 that I would like to address. First of all, H.R. 3094 is by no means an attempt to change or eliminate the commercial red snapper fishery in the Gulf in favor of the recreational fishery. Again, both commercial and recreational fisheries are vital to the Gulf's economy and way of life. Together, the Gulf states' commercial fisheries are the 2nd largest and 2nd most valuable fisheries in the United States after Alaska, producing nearly 1.4 billion pounds and \$746 million of seafood and supporting more than 75,000 jobs in 2012. Of this, Louisiana accounts for nearly 1 billion pounds and \$300 million of seafood. Our commercial fisheries are the 2nd largest and 4th most valuable in the United States and support more than 30,000 jobs. More than 3 million recreational fishermen fish in the Gulf every year, providing a multi-billion dollar economic impact. In Louisiana alone, close to 900,000 recreational fishermen fish our waters, with a couple billion dollar economic impact. (All data is NOAA Fisheries 2012 data, the most recent year for which both landings and economic data are available.)

The primary purpose of H.R. 3094 is to fix how the recreational red snapper fishery is managed. The current "one-size-fits-all" management approach works fairly well for the commercial fishery but is impractical for the diverse recreational fishery. The goal of H.R. 3094 is to ensure fair and equitable access to the red snapper resource and create a management system that is responsive to all stakeholders, both commercial and recreational. H.R. 3094 would improve access for the recreational fishery while preserving a viable commercial fishery. In fact, H.R. 3094 locks in the current commercial management

system, leaves the commercial quota unchanged for at least three years, and requires the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) to approve any significant reduction to the commercial quota thereafter.

The state-based management of federal species proposed by H.R. 3094 is not unprecedented under the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). Similar management structures have already been implemented to varying degrees in fisheries from the East Coast to Alaska. H.R. 3094 would require the Gulf states' fishery management plans to be as consistent with the MSA's standards and requirements as possible. In fact, H.R. 3094 has the same goals as federal management, but the means to reach those goals recognize that one size does not fit all. There are regional differences both in populations of snapper and in fisheries (local tradition, practice, etc.). H.R. 3094 would allow the Gulf states the flexibility to manage the fisheries in their waters in different ways, which is impossible under the current management system.

H.R. 3094 would ensure accountability in the recreational red snapper fishery. In the past, recreational fishermen have exceeded their fishing quotas despite following seasons and other regulations designed to prevent overfishing. Quota overages are due to failure of recreational data collection and inflexible fishery management. H.R. 3094 would address these issues. Among other things, H.R. 3094 calls for more precise and timely recreational data collection, five independent and ongoing evaluations of the fishery every year (rather than treating red snapper as one stock, fished one way), quotas based on stock assessments, and accountability measures to ensure states respond immediately to overfishing (for example, closing the fishery in a non-compliant state).

The Gulf states have already taken action to improve recreational data collection and are using better data to inform management, and anglers have supported these efforts. In Louisiana, anglers supported a license fee increase to fund a new and improved recreational landings data collection program (LA Creel). Near-real-time data from LA Creel has allowed Louisiana to extend the state's recreational red snapper season by hundreds of days and still not exceed fishing quotas, creating a win-win situation for all—an accountable fishery, flexible and responsible management of seasons, and increased fishing opportunities.

Moving management from the Gulf Council's 17 members to the five state directors would make managers more accessible and management more efficient. Through H.R. 3094, fishermen and other stakeholders would have a major role in developing specific management strategies through each state's existing legislative and regulatory processes, commission meetings, various committees and task forces, public outreach meetings, and surveys. H.R. 3094 would make it easier for the public to participate in the management process through more local and more convenient outlets. In addition, state managers can be more responsive to the needs of the resource and the users of the resource. The Gulf Council only meets five times a year and must work through an extremely slow federal management process. In Louisiana, our Wildlife and Fisheries Commission meets once a month; the Secretary of LDWF is able to enact emergency management measures within 72 hours.

States should be allowed to manage the fisheries off their coast in a manner that best benefits the fishery and their state's fishermen, and the Gulf states are fully capable of doing so. H.R. 3094 acknowledges the Gulf states' abilities to responsibly manage this important fishery. The Gulf states already are responsible for numerous major commercial and recreational fisheries and have proven themselves effective stewards of both state and

federally managed species. We cooperatively share management for several species with other states and meet regularly through the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission to discuss issues and standardize data. We have a long track record of no overfished stocks and no overfishing, including several species such as black drum, catfish, sheepshead, and spotted seatrout which all support major commercial and recreational fisheries.

In closing, we would like Congress to consider our concerns and support this viable alternative to the current management framework, removing red snapper from federal authority and placing responsibility for this valuable species in the capable hands of the Gulf states' marine fisheries authorities. We have mutually agreed upon and unanimously support H.R. 3094.