



**Written Statement of Haley Bittermann  
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Before the  
House Subcommittee on Water, Power and Oceans  
“H.R.3094, The Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority Act”  
October 22, 2015**

**Opening:**

Chairman Fleming, Ranking Member Huffman, and Members of the Subcommittee, my name is Haley Bittermann and I am Executive Chef and Director of Operations for the Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group based in New Orleans, LA. I welcome the opportunity to speak with you today on behalf of my company and the National Restaurant Association on the issue of red snapper management in the Gulf of Mexico, as well as on H.R. 3094, The Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority Act.

**Restaurants and Red Snapper: Economic Powerhouses in the Gulf**

The Ralph Brennan Restaurant Group employs approximately 700 employees in 9 restaurants in both Louisiana and California. Our restaurants are known worldwide and have become a top destination serving approximately one million guests every year. Like so many restaurants across our region, Ralph Brennan’s family of restaurants results in tens of millions of dollars in positive economic impact every year.

On the whole, Louisiana’s restaurant industry generates tremendous tax revenues and we provide jobs and build careers for thousands of Louisianans. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the US Census Bureau, Louisiana’s restaurants currently account for 203,100 jobs in Louisiana which equals ten percent of the private sector employment, making restaurants the largest private employer in the state. Our restaurants are projected to register \$7.3 billion in sales in 2015 which is particularly impactful when considering that every \$1 million spent in Louisiana’s restaurants generates an additional 24.6 jobs in the state. Clearly, preserving access to the resources that keep this economic engine running is critical to our state’s bottom line and red snapper is a big part of that.

I’m also here today to represent the restaurant industry as a whole and the National Restaurant Association. Founded in 1919, the National Restaurant Association is the leading business association for the foodservice industry, comprising 1 million restaurant and foodservice outlets. The industry employs 14 million people—about ten percent of the U.S. workforce and is the nation’s second-largest private-sector employer.

Specifically, as I'm sure you're aware diners today are more and more aware of the importance of eating fresh, sustainable, locally-caught seafood. In fact, National Restaurant Association research indicates that of the top 10 culinary trends in 2015, locally-sourced seafood ranked first, environmental sustainability ranked third and sustainable seafood ranked eighth. Gulf red snapper is a key component of many restaurants' menus nationwide. Gulf red snapper is an American treasure that should be accessible to all, not just those who can afford to fish for it themselves.

Unfortunately in the Gulf we have watched a huge number of our popular seafood items become import-only or recreational-only fish. Red snapper, on the other hand, used to be rarely available as a fresh fish before the commercial fishery improved its management and began the individual fishing quota program in 2007. Now I have the opportunity as a chef and a business person to not only vouch for the fish being sustainable and wild-caught, but in some instances the fish is actually traceable back to the fisherman who caught it. As you know, the millions of tourists visiting New Orleans and our Gulf Coast every year are seeking our delicious local, Gulf seafood. We must find a way to protect our commercial harvest of this valuable resource.

### **Federal Management of Commercial Red Snapper is Working:**

Restaurants and retailers nationwide can feel good about offering Gulf red snapper on their menus. Gulf red snapper is currently being managed under a rebuilding plan and commercial fishermen are no longer exceeding catch limits. Commercial red snapper fishermen have the flexibility to fish during times that suit their needs and the needs of the market resulting in a safer, more efficient fishery. Under this program, restaurants like ours can now depend on a steady stream of snapper to fulfill our orders during times of peak demand.

Under H.R. 3094, the successes we are experiencing in the seafood community as a result of this federal program may be completely undone. The fishermen I work with are diametrically opposed to shifting management authority to the state authorities. As written, H.R. 3094 could potentially allow the reallocation of almost 10% per year of red snapper away from the commercial sector to the recreational sector and history shows us that is a very real possibility. Alternatively, in the current, federally-managed program, the seafood supply chain is provided with business certainty and the knowledge that federal oversight is in place to take a balanced approach to allocation decisions.

Sustainability of the fishery is another concern I have with H.R. 3094. Under this legislation, there is no guarantee that the successful federal sustainability standards mandated under Magnuson-Stevens will be preserved.

H.R. 3094 relies heavily on a state management regime to solve the problems facing private anglers. Unfortunately, past experience with state management illustrates that this is not always a wise decision when it comes to preserving commercial catch and its availability on restaurant menus.



For example, red drum, once an important commercial fishery along the northern Gulf coast, is now almost wholly restricted to recreational anglers. This is because the Gulf states, in response to legitimate concerns regarding overharvesting of the species back in the late 1980's, determined that the best way to preserve the fishery was to designate red drum as a gamefish only, thus eliminating an important menu item for our restaurants. At present, after nearly 30 years being designated as a gamefish in almost all Gulf states, the red drum stock has rebounded and recreational catch is now at an all-time high of approximately 16 million pounds, yet commercial fishers remain completely shut out. The Gulf states have simply shifted the catch of red drum from commercial to recreational and refuse to consider opening back up a commercial harvest. In fact, because of this, the only redfish we serve at Redfish Grill in New Orleans is farmed.

Unfortunately, past experience suggests that at the state level, the needs of the private anglers outweigh those of consumers, restaurants and the seafood community. Under the current federal system for Gulf red snapper as authorized by Magnuson Stevens Act, the 17-member Gulf Council represents an equitable cross-section of stakeholders, state representatives and fishery experts. Council decisions are transparent and carefully scrutinized. In terms of commercial red snapper management, we've already got a system that works. That's why I and many others in the restaurant community oppose shifting management of red snapper to the states only. We are concerned the same thing will happen with red snapper as happened with red drum.

**Closing:**

After twenty-plus years as a chef, I know that customers come to the Gulf coast to experience our bounty of delicious, sustainable, Gulf seafood – especially the iconic red snapper which is one of our most popular dishes. Snapper is part of our heritage and our history and, as a recreational fisherman myself, I want to be sure it is available for generations to come.

I oppose H.R. 3094 because it would take red snapper out of the federal management system that has worked so well for those of us in the restaurant and seafood industries. I believe that if we take a balanced approach to fixing what is broken, which is recreational management, that Louisiana can be both a Sportsman's paradise and the restaurant capital of the United States. We, and especially the U.S. Congress, should not have to pick winners and losers. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.

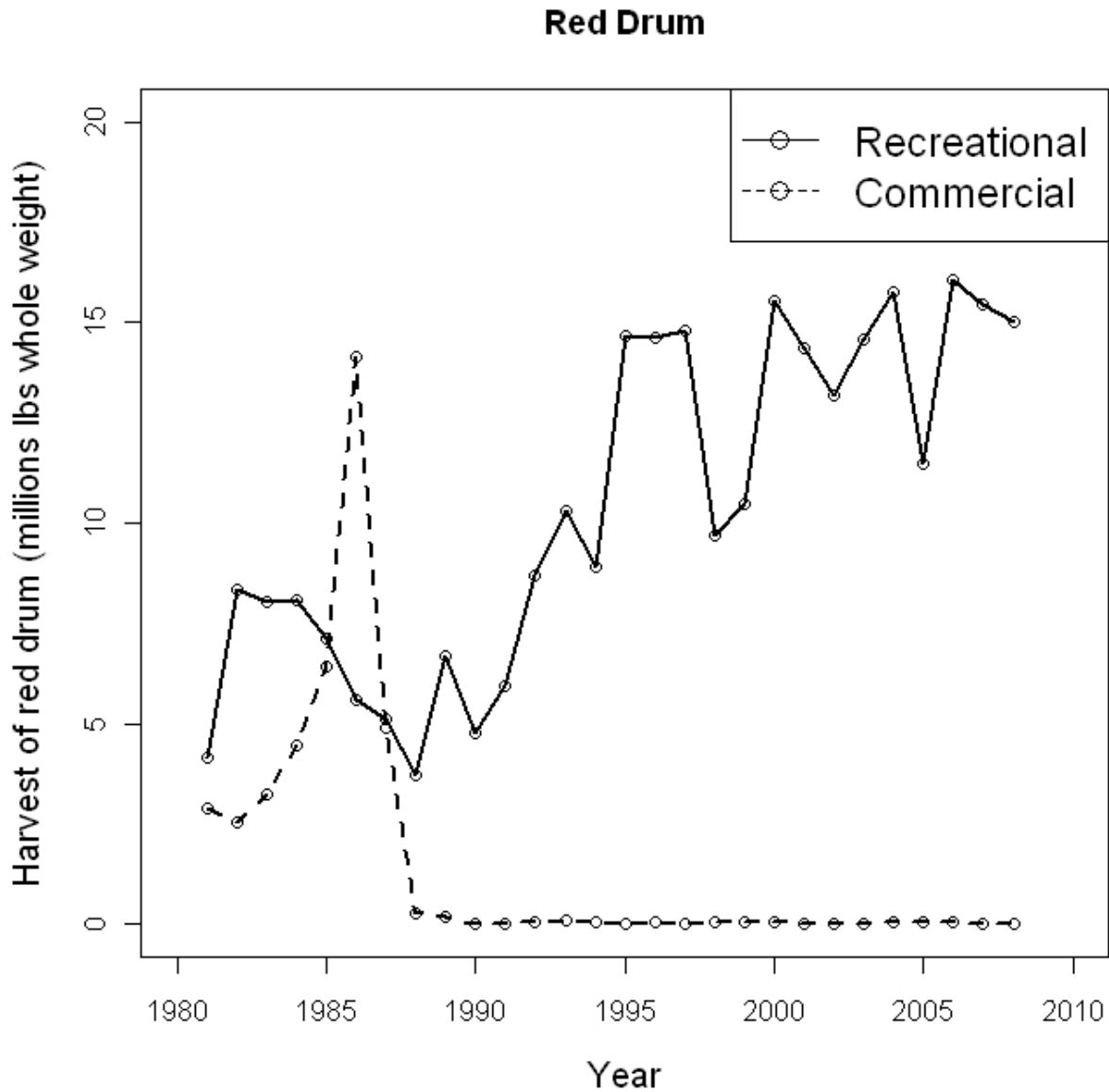


Figure 1. Red drum recreational and commercial landings in Gulf of Mexico state waters from 1981 – 2008. Data Source: Dr. Nick Farmer, NMFS – SEFSC St. Petersburg, Florida.