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June 7, 2022

Ms. Janet Coit
Director
NOAA Fisheries Directorate
1315 East-West Highway
14th Floor
Silver Spring, MD 20910

Dear Director Coit,

Many fishermen — recreational, charter and commercial — are concerned about the short seasons for red snapper in the South Atlantic region. The short season has often meant fierce competition among recreational anglers and even intense conflict among these fishermen as they all attempt to crowd themselves into a single weekend of fishing. As a result, the extremely short two-day recreational season in the South Atlantic is frustrating to my fishing constituents. By contrast in the Gulf, NOAA and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council have ceded the management of recreational snapper fishing to the State of Florida. On April 21st, Governor DeSantis announced a recreation red snapper season totaling 57 days divided between a 45-day summer season and a 12-day fall season.

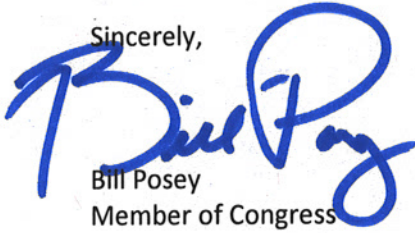
I recognize that the management of the southeastern red snapper fishery is shared between the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council based on our maps with two bodies of water — the Atlantic and the Gulf. However, are the facts and science of fishery management sufficient to justify dividing the State of Florida between the two councils? Is it unreasonable that the offshore waters of Florida are homogeneous enough in terms of fishery management in general and red snapper management in particular to support managing the Florida fishery in a unified manner? Does Atlantic coast Florida red snapper differ so dramatically in numbers and habitat conditions from their Gulf equivalent as to warrant treating Florida waters as two separate red snapper fisheries? The answer isn't obvious. I do not believe we should allow possibly arbitrary regional geographic divisions to prevail over unified state management of red snapper in coordination with NOAA if the underlying science supports or is even merely compatible with such integration. Where states have strong roles in implementing policies, we generally get better results.

Furthermore, I note that the Advisory Panel of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council that provides expert advice on snapper and grouper in South Atlantic federal waters have called for reopening the red snapper fishery based on their opinions that the fishery has recovered dramatically. What studies has NOAA conducted to examine this question and have such studies been peer reviewed?

I urge you to examine these questions and provide me with the results of your review. I am considering legislation to ask an appropriate independent scientific entity to conduct a peer reviewed study of the current status of red snapper populations in Florida waters, whether it would be feasible to unify the state of Florida into the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council or whether it would be feasible to unify the management of the Florida red snapper population under a single set of rules jointly promulgated, implemented and coordinated by the two affected fishery management councils.

I believe that trust is established by open and transparent processes that function to resolve apparent inconsistencies and conflicts among stakeholders, experts, and regulators. I seek that trust for my constituents. I look forward to hearing from you on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Bill Posey", with a large, stylized initial "B" and "P".

Bill Posey
Member of Congress