

“States Rights Red Snapper Plan is Anti-Conservation and Anti-Conservative”

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*Backdown 2*

Representative Garret Graves’s H.R. 3094, the *Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority Act*, is an egregious piece of legislation that flies in the faces of sound leadership and the Republican tenets of what is good for the individual is for the good of the nation. Mr. Graves’s bill would threaten the sacrifice made by all fishermen to rebuild the fishery from only 5 million pounds in 2008 to the historic levels of 14.3-million pounds in 2014. It would also create great uncertainty about the future ability to enjoy red snapper for the millions of citizens that either accesses the fishery through a restaurant, a fish house, or on the back of a charter boat.

The *Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority Act* seeks to shift management of the Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishery to the states in a new quasi-governmental agency comprised of the Gulf States’ five marine fishery directors or their proxies, a redundant body that already exists at the Gulf Council. All management decisions would be based on a simple majority vote and states would be mandated under the authority to manage the fishery to equilibrium, an ambiguous and legally undefined term that is not outlined in existing fishery management law.

In Representative Graves’s proposal the states would manage the red snapper as the Atlantic State Marine Fisheries Commission manages the American striped bass, a fishery that has undergone a boom and bust cycle predicated on the minimum threshold for conserving the stock. But as we find in this model, as the states quibble amongst themselves to get the most fish, the resource and fishermen suffer. Read any blog or numerous articles in the recreational glossies and one is quick to discover that the striped bass management model is broken and that the fishery, after more than a decade of federal-water closures and interstate bickering, is once again on the edge of being deemed overfished.

But yet, even with the failed striped bass model as a warning, the *Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority Act* wants to deliver a red snapper fishery that has turned into a federal rebuilding success story into a tale of the states can do it better, leading the red snapper right down the striped bass road of depletion. One of the main reasons cited for justification of H.R. 3049 is a fictionalized narrative that builds a perception that the states have better data and more adaptable science. Not to mention, the states have better management ability because they know their anglers better than the Feds do.

But is this about the angler or the resource?

Many will refer to the much maligned Marine Resources Information Program as reason for the failed federal management system. But one must realize it is not a giant leap to turn fingers back upon the states for this program’s failures.

Left to their own devices under MRIP, much as the *Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority Act* would do, the states developed five different surveys to gauge their anglers’ effort. What resulted were five dramatically different science languages that don’t speak to a centralized one. Texas, for example, often reports their Creel Survey data 14 months after the fish was

actually caught. Because of the states' failure to supply the organizing body, in this case the Feds, accurate and timely data, the general rallying cry has been that the data must be better. But it was the states' data and their collection that got us here in the first place.

Garbage in; garbage out, right?

Data for data's sake is not better data, but rather a tool to inform and track a resource. Alabama's recent release of their landings estimates were expertly timed to coincide with a hearing on H.R. 3049, but their press release does not justify or provide evidence that the states should manage red snapper. At most it is an example of how the states should be partnering with the federal government to make improvements. In fact, Alabama's new red snapper program was created with "a lot" of input from MRIP. Unfortunately, that partnership role seems to be completely missing in current management discussions.

The Gulf States have a similar regional management amendment to Graves's H.R. 3094 working through the council process now, but the states have failed to agree upon allocations that they deem fair to themselves. What is the magic bullet in Mr. Graves's resolution that will ensure that the states will play fair and consider the resource over the angler or in service to the angler even?

Because without the resource, do we have anglers?

Ultimately, the *Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority Act* places every single angler, every single seafood consumer, every single marine-based commercial interest, every single tourist enterprise in the Gulf, and sadly the resource in danger. That places jobs in danger and depletes, not conserves, the resource.

For Southern politics that are all about smaller government, jobs creation, and the best for the nation, the *Gulf States Red Snapper Management Authority Act* flies in the face of the South's political birthrights. The creation of the management body expands fishery management bureaucracy by asking our state managers to attend more meetings each year, conduct stock assessments that the states are ill-equipped to handle, and provide their own data collection and analysis, all at the cost of our taxpayers, when all are already embedded in the regional process for every other managed marine resource. How can we ensure proper management of our fisheries in the states where fickle political priorities can shift emphasis and monies away from needed programs? Just ask Alabama that just shuttered a number of state parks because it raided the resource department's budget to supplement its general fund. That is not the security a resource as important as red snapper deserves.

H.R. 3094 is an abomination to good sense and southern culture. It is an insult to the hard working watermen, restaurateurs, hoteliers, and tackle shops that struggle to maintain the southern culture's Gulf-centric way of life. Why would we support something like this?