



## FIFTY TWO REASONS NOAA MUST CONDUCT FISHERIES STOCK ASSESSMENTS IN THE SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES ©

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"Science will set us free," has been a rallying cry for commercial and recreational fishermen from Texas through North Carolina for several decades. It will continue to be a passionate, continuous rallying cry in 2013. Science is non-partisan. Fish are non-partisan. The private sector group of men and women who fight for equal protection under the law and more transparency in how our tax dollars are spent by NOAA are non-partisan.

**(Week # 4 of 52 weeks) "If you can't measure a fish stock, you can't manage it."**

Southeastern Fisheries Association (SFA) observes there was little control of harvest from the spawning aggregation whenever a fish stock was declared as overfished. This observation applies to the southeastern United States fish stocks and the world stocks as well. One reader of SFA's weekly message on stock assessment needs pointed out, "*Often there was no management, but even where management programs exist the aggregations were not protected because they were considered only part of a larger ocean stock. The easiest explanation for the disappearance of these stocks is that they were distinct stocks, and semi isolated at spawning. Once the spawners were knocked down, it took only a minor amount of fishing effort to prevent their recovery.*"

The reader further states, "*As long as management works on a different scale in space and time than the fisheries, and with less resolution, they cannot protect the fish resources, they cannot measure the fish resource with precision, they cannot model the fish resource with accuracy, they will continue to fail, and industry will continue to disappear. Since government management agencies fear new methods which could show the weaknesses of their practices, they will not change the status quo. Since environmental groups do not differentiate government from independent science, they will not demand new science. So, it is left to the fishing industry. Demand independent science or perish.*"

Southeastern Fisheries Association (SFA) has been begging for stock assessments for all of the fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic, but to no avail. Some advise us to be careful because we might get what we ask for and will not like the results. SFA believes honest, peer-reviewed, transparent stock assessments will be whatever they will be. If stock assessments under a robust SEDAR protocol are performed without predetermined scientific conclusions, then all people involved in the fishing industry will have to accept the facts as facts.

SFA has watched with great sadness what the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council has done to the region's fishing industry, especially Florida. The Council on a 7 to 6 highly contentious vote banned ALL red snapper harvest for the past two years except for a few weekends in late 2012 for anglers and a 50 pound trip limit a few days for commercial fishermen. The 50 pound trip limit was disingenuous.

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council leans strongly toward closing more and more fishing areas and reducing total allowable harvest whenever possible. If the Council truly wants to manage the fish resources under their jurisdiction they must demand that NOAA science centers provide them with much more current, empirical data on which to base their regulatory decisions.

**"If you can't measure a fish stock, you can't manage it."**

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