



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

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**(Week # 11 of 52 weeks)**

### **“If NOAA does not measure a fish stock, NOAA cannot manage it.”**

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is currently faced with two tough issues that, in the minds of many, could have been avoided if there was more empirical data included in the Council’s red snapper stock assessment. What the Scientific and Statistical Committee members see on their computers and what the fishermen see on the water are two different worlds.

NOAA does not recognize reality of relative abundance, if it doesn’t mirror the scientific modeling NOAA put so much effort into constructing. NOAA will not take the chance that their science is incomplete or imprecise or that it would be greatly improved if it was transparent enough for every stakeholder to see what they are actually doing and how they are doing it.

The first issue facing the Gulf Council is Louisiana joining Texas in non-compliance with the Council’s red snapper management plan. This will allow Louisiana fishermen to catch red snapper throughout the year. Florida is probably going to vote to become non-compliant at next month’s FWC meeting. That leaves Alabama and Mississippi as the only two states in compliance with NOAA regulations. Politics will probably not let them stay in that position for long.

If all Gulf States are non-compliant, NOAA will further reduce red snapper in federal waters, making it a federal crime for sport fishermen and charter/party boats to keep red snapper hooked in federal waters.

The second issue is the attempt to intimidate the Council members by sending hundreds of emails to each Council member telling them to reallocate red snapper. The angler group said they would have a longer red snapper fishing season if they got all the fish. They also say their catching all the fish is best for the nation’s economy instead of half of the red snapper quota going on the market for non-boaters and tourists. This has been their standard, avaricious argument since 1976.

Many of the emails are un-complimentary and bullying. Some of them are from wealthy sport fishermen “demanding” that Council members do what they were hired to do i.e. steal the red snapper from the restaurants and non-boating consumers like they did the redfish.

Does everyone remember how the federal redfish were taken away from the consumers? It’s way past time to reopen the Gulf of Mexico redfish fishery and let our coastal restaurants share this fish with the tourists, local consumers and especially non-boaters.

If it’s time to reallocate, let’s start with reallocating redfish and move on to the next species that is not allocated in a fair manner. Again, if there were honest, transparent, stakeholder - participatory stock assessments on red snapper and other species, the hatred would diminish from many angler groups.

Most of this drama could be avoided if NOAA would undertake cooperative fisheries research with commercial and sport fishing sectors as part of open and transparent red snapper stock assessments.

The US House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee is meeting this week to hear from a variety of people concerning the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Steven Act. Southeastern Fisheries has been invited to testify and the one main message will be that science can set us free, if there are adequate and accurate stock assessments in place before regulations are adopted. Always Remember,

***If NOAA does not measure a fish stock, NOAA cannot manage it.***

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