



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

**April 14, 2013**

**(Week # 16 of 52 weeks)**

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

The domestic seafood industry has asked NOAA’s Southeast Science Center for better stock assessments for years. Our very legitimate concerns always fall on deaf ears. NOAA officials tell the industry they could always use more data, but they are convinced their “science” is more than adequate. NOAA generously funds management councils to recommend “science-based” regulations to the Secretary. NOAA controls the council’s voting membership through the appointment process except for state directors, or their proxies. NOAA rules are inflexible.

The commercial seafood/fishing industry and several recreational organizations formed a coalition five years ago to strongly encourage NOAA to allocate more federal dollars for stock assessments that put scientists on the water. The coalition’s efforts are being fought by those who either enjoy status quo or would never work with the commercial fishing industry under any circumstance.

NOAA’s management vise has tightened on red snapper recreational anglers. As a result, there was a recent revolt by four of the five governors of the Gulf states, demanding that NOAA’s management of the recreational red snapper fishery be given to the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission, similar to the striped bass management given to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

According to the April 17, 2013 press release by the governors, *“With a stock that is recovering steadily, our recreational anglers are being allowed to fish less and less, and there is no hint of willingness from NOAA Fisheries to deviate from this present, unsatisfactory course. As governors of Gulf states, we believe this confusing management is just the latest evidence of a federal management system that is irretrievably broken. We seek to establish a better fishery management approach for Gulf red snapper.”*

Southeastern Fisheries Association believes all of this would have been avoided, if NOAA was willing to be more transparent with their lab activities. NOAA should concede they don’t have all the answers or anywhere near enough empirical data to properly manage the red snapper resource. NOAA can easily, efficiently and more economically obtain better scientific data through cooperative research with commercial and recreational fishermen. Unfortunately under our federal system, nothing will happen unless the science center directors allow it to happen. The bureaucracy on one hand keeps the bad guys from stealing the government blind for the most part. On the other hand fisheries bureaucracy has insufficient interaction with industry which is the fault of both parties. Maybe this Gulf states initiative to take over recreational management of Gulf of Mexico red snapper will cause NOAA policymakers to take a long overdue inventory of their drastic actions.

The inventory will show how much NOAA has harmed the domestic fishing industry and the coastal communities including restaurants and tourism. NOAA has converted to “dark green.” Critters are far more important to NOAA than human beings providing seafood and recreational anglers enjoying hooking and eating the fish they catch.

I have been asked, “What do you mean by stock assessment?” I view that question the same as if I asked someone, “What do you mean by sustainable?” No quick or easy answer for either.

### **If NOAA does not measure a fish stock, NOAA cannot manage it. Did they measure red snapper?**

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