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APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

August 20, 2014

Dear Chairman Boyd and members of the Gulf Council:

As an avid Mississippi Gulf Coast recreational angler, I'm dismayed that we've allowed red snapper management in the Gulf of Mexico to become so convoluted and polarized. Amendment 40, also known as "sector separation", currently before the Gulf Council seeks to drive a wedge between the charter/for-hire and private recreational angler as a solution to the inept federal management of red snapper. Mississippi is the perfect example of where, as the fish get bigger and the quota is reached more quickly, we have fewer days to fish. With virtually no red snapper reefs within Mississippi state waters, our recreational anglers are slowly being squeezed out of the fishery with ridiculously short federal seasons. However, the best solution the Gulf Council can come up with for recreational anglers is to squeeze even more anglers out of the fishery with sector separation? I think not – we can do better than that.

My solution would be to turn red snapper management over to the states. We need to give management of this important recreational and commercial species to agencies that will ensure evidence-based, scientific management for the benefit of all Americans. We can't afford to leave it in the hands of political bureaucrats who dictate which side wins while others lose. The states have proven they can successfully manage recreational fisheries for decades. Spotted seatrout in coastal Mississippi is just one of many examples of successful, state-based management of mixed sector fisheries.

Putting myself in the shoes of the charter/for-hire captain, I would pause to seriously think about what sector-separation means to me and my business before endorsing it as the saving grace. There are always more losers than winners in a catch-share system, which is clearly where this is all headed. Catch shares remind me of musical chairs at the county fair. Each time you go around, there's one less chair and one less person participating until, finally, only one person is left holding the pie. At some point, you're going to be share cropping for someone or some corporation if you hope to fish at all.

I want to be clear – I'm not against commercial or charter/for-hire fishermen. I'm simply against this heavy-handed approach that will only benefit a few while the possibility of finding a real solution to the problem for all anglers and coastal communities slips further and further away.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Herb Frierson".

Representative Herb Frierson
Mississippi Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus