We write to you today as a unified group of commercial fishing organizations and seafood suppliers from throughout the United States that are concerned with what we see unfolding in the Gulf of Mexico. Specifically, we strongly oppose the push by the five Gulf states to take possession of the red snapper fishery through a legislative exemption to the Magnuson Stevens Act. This action sets a dangerous precedent for fishermen like us throughout the United States and the conservation measures we need to protect our fisheries.

According to the most recent report of fisheries economics of the United States, commercial fishermen in the U.S. harvested 9.6 billion pounds of finfish and shellfish in 2012, earning $5.1 billion for their catch. Additionally, commercial fishing contributes 1.3 million jobs and $141 billion in total sales to the economy of the U.S. The Gulf states' ploy directly threatens the seafood industry and our economic contribution to the nation by removing accountability to the Magnuson Stevens Act, failing to protect the commercial fishery, eliminating public involvement in the regulatory process, and prioritizing recreational fishing interests above all others.

The Gulf states' fishery directors hold five seats on the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council, the body that that oversees the implementation of the Magnuson Stevens Act. Time and time again these same individuals have voted against the interests of the commercial fishery. That, combined with their refusal to explain how they would manage the commercial fishery, and the admittance of at least one major private angler organization that the goal is to shut down the commercial red snapper fishery, should give every member of Congress pause – it certainly raises concern with us.

The Magnuson Stevens Act requires fishermen to be accountable for what they catch and for fishery management plans to prioritize conservation measures. Without these protections, healthy fisheries can return to an overfished state and fisheries that need protection may not get it. This will hurt fishing businesses like ours, cause the loss of our fishing and shoreside jobs, and harm our fishing communities that rely on healthy stocks to survive. American seafood consumers will feel the sting of this impact as their healthy and sustainable seafood choices become limited and replaced by cheap imports or are fraudulently mislabeled.

The nation's supply of Gulf of Mexico red snapper will be threatened if the Gulf States take over the commercial red snapper fishery, exempt themselves from the Magnuson Stevens Act, and turn over this fishery to the recreational sector. The implications of such a takeover are far-reaching and set a dangerous precedent for our region and others - over 97% of the more than 300,000 million Americans get their access to fish and shellfish by purchasing it in restaurants, grocery stores, and fish markets that we supply. We cannot support this plan in the Gulf because we would not support it at home.

Thank you for your consideration. We appreciate your help in protecting commercial fishermen, the seafood supply chain, and seafood consumers throughout the United States by opposing this ill-advised, precedent-setting plan.

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