



**Marine
Fish
Conservation
Network**

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Contact: Tom Wheatley, 727-550-1121
twheatley@conservefish.org

Congress Moves to Halt Consolidation of Fisheries *Gulf of Mexico Fishermen Urge Caution on Red Snapper IFQ Program*

ST. PETERSBURG, FL – Coastal U.S. Representatives today introduced the “Fishing Quota Standards Act of 2005” to ensure that individual fishing quota (IFQ) systems, often touted as the management solution to our declining fisheries, would give fair and equitable opportunities to small-boat fishermen and fishing communities and would responsibly protect marine environments. Currently, fisheries managers in the Gulf of Mexico are developing an IFQ system for red snapper and considering doing the same in several other fisheries.

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council will be meeting in August to discuss a controversial IFQ program for red snapper. Red snapper was declared overfished in 1989 and since that time management decisions have not led to the rebound of the popular food and game fish. Without national standards in effect before the red snapper IFQ program is completed there will be no assurances that the program will meet conservation needs of red snapper or prevent rapid consolidation of the fishery at the expense of family fishermen and fishing communities.

“It is an indispensable duty which we owe to all fishermen - to maintain fairness in all our laws governing the allocation of our natural resources - whether the fishermen are rich or poor, big or little. It is all summed up in this quote by President Ronald Reagan: ‘Every once in a while, somebody has to get the bureaucracy by the neck and shake it loose and say, stop doing what you are doing,’” said Ray Pringle, President of the Florida Fishermen’s Federation.

“When assigning a public resource to private individuals for their personal profit, fishery managers should adhere to very strict guidelines or they may do more harm to the resource than good. That is why we need national standards in place before the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council moves forward on a red snapper IFQ program. We have to make sure we bring red snapper back to healthy levels for the sake of both recreational and commercial fishermen,” said Mike Leech, Ambassador-At-Large of the International Game Fish Association.

IFQ systems use quota shares to give fishermen exclusive access to a fixed percentage of the total annual quota in a fishery. The Bush Administration promoted these systems in its U.S. Ocean Action Plan released in December in response to the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy report as the primary way to stop declining fish populations.

Documented research has shown that IFQ systems without strong national standards often create multiple economic and environmental problems. For example, IFQ systems give an unfair advantage to large corporations and industry participants who have more capital to buyout other quota share holders. These systems also create incentives to throw less valuable fish back dead or dying, and to promote stewardship only for fish species with a high market value.

“Individual fishing quotas can be an effective fishery management tool if and only if strong national standards are in place to protect fish populations, the marine environment, and the interests of fishing communities,” said Lee Crockett, executive director of the Marine Fish Conservation Network. “This bill creates a solution to the potential pitfalls of quota systems and ensures that they accomplish all that their proponents want them to.”

The Fishing Quota Standards Act of 2005 would:

- Require IFQ systems to demonstrate strong conservation performance, such as reducing bycatch (the catching and killing of non-target species) and protecting essential fish habitat, or be subject to modification or limitation during system renewal.
- Prevent fishermen from holding shares in perpetuity and excluding other participants by determining that quota shares are not property rights and may be renewed every seven years.
- Recover the direct costs of the IFQ system, including enforcement, management, and data collection.
- Prevent industry monopolies by limiting quota ownership to one percent of the total quota unless a council can demonstrate that such an increase will not be detrimental to other shareholders.
- Allocate quota fairly among vessel categories and gear types, giving initial preference to fishermen who have a long history of participating in the fishery.
- Allow fair access to new entrants, including entry-level fishermen, small vessel owners, and crew members.

NOTE: For more information on the risks of IFQ programs, please see the attached fact sheet, “Fishing Quota Standards Act of 2005,” or visit <http://www.conservefish.org/site/mediacenter/pressreleases/>.

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The Marine Fish Conservation Network is a coalition of over 175 national and regional environmental organizations, commercial and recreational fishing groups, aquariums, and marine science groups dedicated to conserving marine fish and to promoting their long-term sustainability. For more information, please visit www.conservefish.org