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Fisheries Controversy at the Capitol



The Magnuson-Stevens Act of 1976 (MSA) was established primarily to ensure fisheries sustainability, but also to generate benefits such as increased fishing opportunities and revenue for commercial and recreational sectors. The MSA has guided federal fisheries management for decades and is credited for rebuilding many fish stocks since 2000. The MSA was reauthorized in 1996 and 2006, and requirements for catch limits, catch shares, and rebuilding timelines were updated. Currently, two bills introduced

in 2017 have prompted discussions about a third reauthorization, and heated debates have ensued between stakeholder groups, especially on the Gulf Coast where red snapper management remains controversial.

Bill 1: “Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act”

- House of Representatives ([HR](#)) [200](#)
 - Sponsored by Alaska representative Don Young
 - Introduced January 23, 2017
 - Approved by the United States House Committee on Natural Resources on December 13, 2017
 - House and Senate have yet to act

Bill 2: “Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act of 2017”

- [HR 2023](#)
 - Sponsored by Louisiana representative Garret Graves
 - Introduced April 6, 2017
- Senate ([S](#)) [1520](#)
 - Sponsored by Mississippi Senator Roger Wicker
 - Introduced July 10, 2017

Recreational Anglers' View

Recreational anglers are asking people to **vote yes** on these bills.

They claim that the MSA was designed to manage the commercial fishing sector, where catch is generally easily determined from a relatively small number of boats, but breaks down when applied to the recreational sector, where catch is roughly estimated due to the staggering quantity of recreational anglers and vessels. The bills dictate that commercial and recreational sectors are different and should be managed by differing approaches, and recreational anglers agree with this statement.

Recreational anglers approve of giving states a greater role in fisheries management, asserting that states can manage fisheries just as well as, or even better than, the federal government. Regarding reallocation, recreational anglers feel that more of the

catch should be allocated to the recreational sector because recreational anglers often far outnumber commercial anglers (particularly in the Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishery). Citing the collapse of Gulf of Mexico redfish in the 1980s, recreational anglers contend that commercial anglers do not prioritize conservation and simply wish to maintain control of their current share of the red snapper fishery. In summary, recreational anglers believe that reforms to the MSA are required to improve and modernize federal fisheries management, and the vast recreational fishing sector must be considered when making decisions about reform.

Commercial Anglers', Chefs', and Environmentalists' View

This assembly of stakeholders is asking people to **vote no** on these bills.

Twenty-six chefs, primarily from the New Orleans area, wrote a letter to Congress to express their concerns, and commercial anglers and environmentalists support the chefs' opinions. These stakeholders claim that the new bills would weaken the MSA, deteriorate fisheries management, and threaten the sustainability of marine resources. Commercial fishermen believe that certain provisions of the MSA, such as catch shares, have been instrumental in rebuilding stocks.

The bills suggest a thorough review of catch shares accompanied by a moratorium on catch share programs, which commercial anglers and environmentalists perceive as detrimental and a waste of resources. Additionally, the bills propose increasingly strict referendum requirements for catch shares, which would make it difficult for commercial fishermen to use these programs.

Both bills also address the contentious issue of reallocation; commercial anglers and chefs, citing consistent Gulf of Mexico red snapper quota overages by recreational anglers in recent years, believe that allocating additional quantities to the recreational sector would exacerbate overfishing. Other provisions cited by chefs, commercial anglers, and environmentalists as a threat to sustainability and conservation include giving states more power in managing fisheries (for

example, states would have veto power over exempted fishing permits, which would complicate the process of obtaining EFPs) and allowing managers to rely less on scientific data when drafting rebuilding plans. In summary, chefs, commercial anglers, and environmentalists overwhelmingly believe that the MSA has proved successful for decades and should continue to govern federal fisheries management without any modifications.

As you can see, this is a complex issue - where do you stand?

A Year in Review:

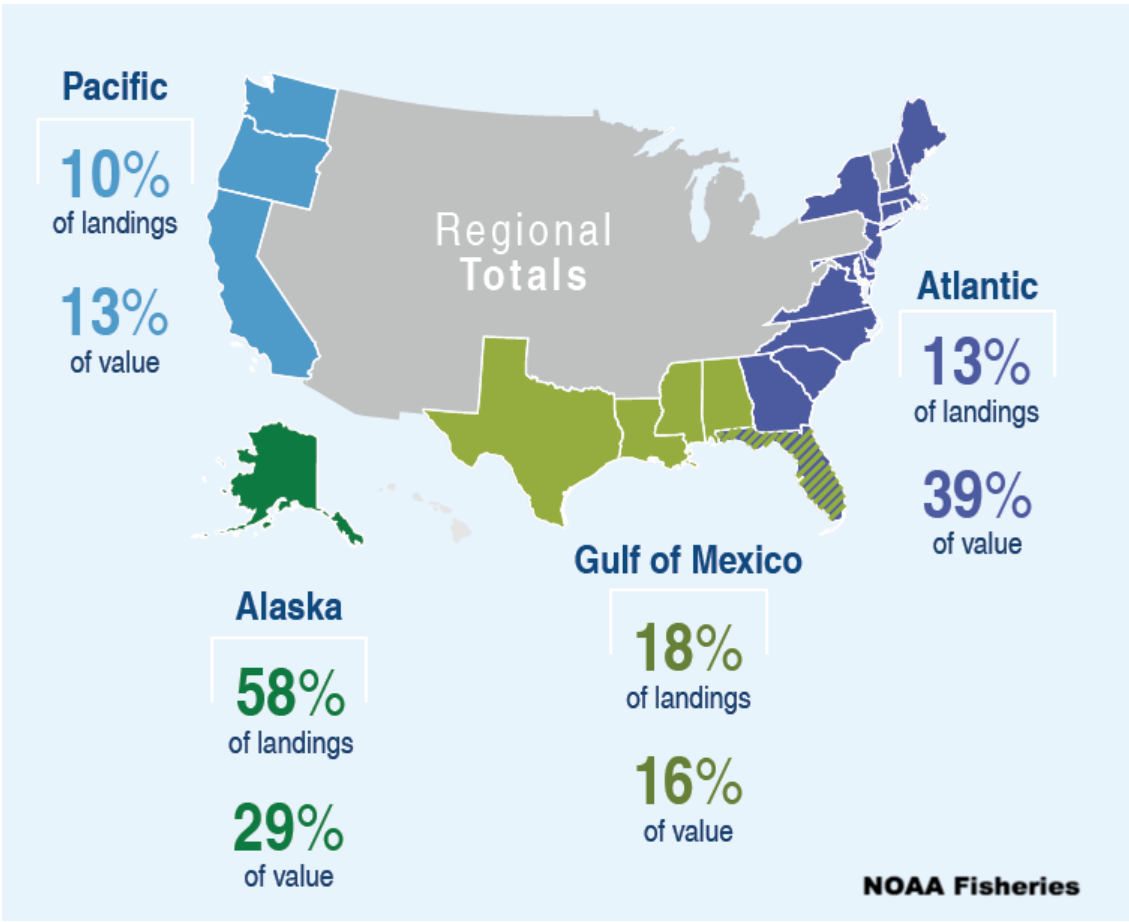
2016 U.S. Commercial Fishery Landings

Each year, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries produces three annual reports covering different aspects of the status of United States marine fisheries:

- Fisheries of the U.S.
- Status of Stocks
- Fisheries Economics of the U.S.

We will be reviewing each of these topics and their relevance to Gulf States commercial fisheries in our monthly newsletters. This month, we have provided information from the report "Fisheries of the U.S." (the NOAA Fisheries yearbook of fishery statistics for the United States), for the most recent year with complete data (2016).

2016 U.S. Commercial Fisheries Highlights



U.S. Totals

LANDINGS **9.6 B**

(billion) pounds

-1.5% from 2015

VALUE **\$5.3 B**

(billion dollars)

+2.1% from 2015



Gulf of Mexico Totals

LANDINGS **1.7 B**

(billion) pounds

+12% from 2015

VALUE **\$0.8 B**

(billion dollars)

+5% from 2015



Modified from NOAA Fisheries

In 2016, Mississippi landed 304 million pounds, the 5th highest U.S. state by volume of landings. Here's how those landings break down:

For **menhaden**, U.S. total landings were 1.7 billion pounds, valued at \$179.8 million. Gulf region landings were 1.4 billion pounds valued at \$143.3 million, or **82% of the national total**.

For **oysters**, U.S. total landings yielded 33.3 million pounds. The Gulf region led production with ~15 million pounds, **or 44% of the national total**.

For **shrimp**, U.S. landings were ~270 million pounds, with the Gulf contribution at 189 million pounds, or **70% of the national total**.

A Call to Commercial Fishermen

Catch data contributed by you, the fisherman, provides scientists and managers with important information they need to make informed decisions concerning the effective stewardship of living marine resources. See our April and May newsletters to learn how your reported catch data contributes to the health of fish stocks and generates economic benefits. Can't wait? Click [here](#) for more information.

FOR THE COMPLETE REPORT, click [here](#)

Attention Recreational & Charter Red Snapper Anglers!



Photo by David Hay Jones

Your cooperation is crucial to the success of our red snapper high-reward tagging project!

- The goal of this project is to aid in estimating recreational exploitation of red snapper in the northern Gulf of Mexico.

- Red snapper across the northern Gulf have been (in 2016 and 2017) and will be (in 2018) tagged prior to the recreational fishing season.
- These tags are yellow and are located on the back of the fish, just below the dorsal fin. Each tag is worth \$250!

Why is it important to report a tag?

- Reporting a yellow high-reward red snapper tag **will not**, and **did not previously**, influence decisions concerning the federal red snapper season length or any other federal regulations for this fishery.
- This project relies on a reporting rate of **nearly 100%**.
- When tags are **not** reported, adjustments need to be made in the data to **account for the non-reporting**.
- These adjustments are often **conservative**, and typically result in **exploitation estimates that are higher than the true exploitation rate**, which could negatively influence regulations.
- It is **best to report all tags** so that **fishers can benefit from the tag reward** and **model estimates are accurate**, with no adjustments necessary to compensate for non-reporting.

How do I report a tag?

- Call the number listed on the tag to report and collect the \$250 reward.



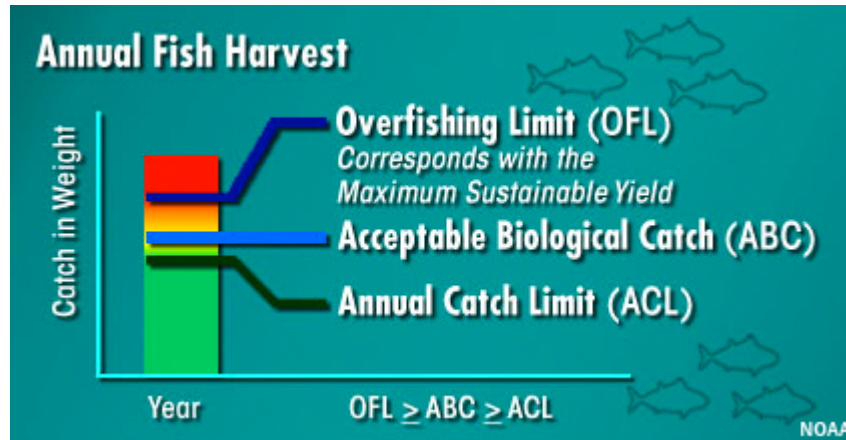
Sea of Acronyms

Being an informed angler begins with understanding the terminology used in fisheries management. This series helps demystify the concepts hidden beneath a sea of acronyms.

ACL

Annual Catch Limit

The amount of fish that can be caught by fishermen in a year; this is also known as the Total Allowable Catch (TAC). The ACL is set by the Council (in our case, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council) for each stock or stock complex based on the Acceptable Biological Catch (ABC), the first acronym in our series (remember, the ABC is established by the Council's SSC, or Scientific and Statistical Committee). The ACL by law cannot exceed the ABC. Below is an excellent graphic from NOAA Fisheries illustrating some of these concepts.



Upcoming events

[Mobile Boat Show](#)

March 2-4

Mobile, AL

[Louisiana Fisheries Forward Summit](#)

March 6

New Orleans, LA

[Alabama Red Snapper Conference](#)

March 22

Mobile, AL

[Celebrate the Gulf](#)

April 7

Pass Christian, MS

[CCA Casting for Conservation](#)

April 14

Gulfport, MS



I'm Marcus Drymon, an Assistant Extension Professor at Mississippi State University and a Marine Fisheries Specialist at Mississippi-Alabama Sea Grant. I'd like to hear from you - please send any comments or questions to marcus.drymon@msstate.edu, and click on the links below for more information on my website and Facebook page.



Contributing authors shown with their favorite fishes: Amanda Jefferson (triggerfish), Extension Associate and Emily Seubert (sharpnose shark), Extension Program Associate.



Facebook Website

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