



Testimony to the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
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Good afternoon, Chairman Boyd and Gulf Council members. My name is Sharon McBreen with The Pew Charitable Trusts. Thank you for the opportunity to address you on a number of issues today.

First though, we offer our sincere condolences to the families and friends of Larry Simpson, Dr. Leard and Dr. Burns. They all were great contributors to the knowledge and management of the Gulf's fisheries. Also, to Dr. Bortone, we appreciate your strong leadership on our Gulf's fisheries resources and wish you well in your next chapter.

Pew supports investigating new ways to manage recreational fisheries that allow for more fishing opportunities while keeping the catch within science-based limits. We support the continued development of the charter pilot program as a means to test a new management strategy that could help prevent overfishing and also allow charter fishermen to operate their businesses in a more flexible and efficient manner. However, this pilot should be designed around clear and specific objectives aimed at more effectively implementing catch limits.

The most important components of this pilot are ensuring that electronic catch data is sufficiently validated and fishing activity is effectively monitored.

We also support moving forward with the Framework Action requiring electronic reporting for the headboat fishery, and we support the Council's preferred alternative to require weekly or more frequent reporting. However, as we heard today on the MRIP pilot for-hire report, strong validation and monitoring components are essential to ensure electronic logbooks provide accurate data in addition to more timely reporting. We urge that the details to ensure these electronic logbooks provide accurate data be outlined in the Framework Action document.

For regional management of red snapper, as this issue continues to move forward, it needs to include some key components for successful implementation and to keep rebuilding on track. These components must include strong accountability measures and

close fishery monitoring in the states with the necessary infrastructure in place prior to implementation. Ideally, this would be a coordinated effort across states to improve data collection methods to ensure states stay within their science-based catch limits.

Also, we support the development of a plan amendment to look at implementing a permit system for the private recreational fishery. However, we note that this action could be potentially merged into regional management, or another trailing amendment. Whatever the vehicle or process, we urge the Council to continue to look at ways to identify and track the offshore recreational fishing participants uniformly across the Gulf.

Lastly, we support the harvest and sampling of red drum in the EEZ for the purpose of collecting scientific information in order to conduct a gulf-wide stock assessment. However, this harvest should be done through the scientific process. In 2008, the Southeast Fishery Science Center recommended the scientific harvest of 20,000 fish to gather necessary age composition, population abundance and mortality data. That analysis recommended specific sampling protocols to gather the necessary information in preparation for a stock assessment to be conducted in 2009. The Special Red Drum Working Group echoed the SEFSC recommendation at their July 2010 meeting. It was never the intent for these 20,000 fish to just be collected by recreational or commercial fishermen during their ordinary fishing trips but for those fish to be harvested under strict scientific sampling protocols which could include the assistance of fishermen. However, the sampling to collect those fish and the stock assessment never happened.

Moving forward, Pew recommends that the Council reconvene the Special Red Drum Working Group, or the Red Drum SSC, to determine the path forward to conduct a gulf-wide assessment. The objective of this meeting, as we see it, would be to evaluate the current data needs, design sampling programs to collect the needed data, and recommend any action that the Gulf Council can take to facilitate this data collection. Any outcomes should then be reviewed by the Standing SSC. Let's take this issue back to the appropriate scientific channels and work it up from there before taking action on any type of limited fishery.

Thanks again for the opportunity to present our comments to you all today.

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