

September 12, 2025

Honorable John Rutherford  
1711 Longworth Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Buddy Carter  
2432 Rayburn Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Russell Fry  
345 Cannon Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable David Rouzer  
2333 Rayburn Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear U.S. Reps. Rutherford, Carter, Fry, and Rouzer:

Thank you for co-chairing the South Atlantic Red Snapper Task Force.

Attached you will find a South Atlantic States Action Plan signed by all four states that outlines the plans to make state management of red snapper a reality.

Thank you for your support and leadership, and we look forward to updating you as state management progresses.

Sincerely,

Jessica McCawley

On behalf of the South Atlantic state agencies

## **South Atlantic States Action Plan for State Management of Atlantic Red Snapper**

**Background:** Inadequate data combined with the one-size-fits-all management approach imposed under the MSA hinders access to the resource for many anglers.

**Purpose:** Pilot and test state data collection programs through an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) in state and federal waters as an important component of improved recreational management of Atlantic red snapper that would include greater flexibility and involvement from the states. This EFP program aligns with the Presidential Executive Order “Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness”.

### **Common goals:**

- Each willing state agrees to apply for an EFP from NOAA Fisheries annually for up to three years to develop/implement a data collection program **or** test existing data collection programs to move towards state management of Atlantic red snapper.
  - Exempted Fishing Permits (EFPs) allow selected vessels to operate outside standard fishing regulations to collect scientific data on the current stock. These permits are critical because they provide access to real-time data on fish discards and catch rates.
- While EFPs are underway, the South Atlantic Council (Council) will begin Amendments (overarching Amendment and one for each state) to formalize state management of Atlantic red snapper through the Council process.
- EFPs would allow each state to set a fishing season and bag and/or vessel limit and would be inclusive of private recreational anglers and for-hire operators.
  - Access will be increased across all states, but each state will tailor EFPs to state-specific needs and angler preferences.
  - NC, SC, and GA aim to test state data collection programs for Atlantic red snapper across a time-certain duration yet to be determined.
  - FL aims to use the State Reef Fish Survey to test state management of Atlantic red snapper. A set open season for Atlantic red snapper would be implemented based on what would work best for Florida, which would be informed by public workshops scheduled for October 2025.
  - Some components being considered for the EFPs include:
    - Ways to identify anglers going offshore.
    - Recreational reporting via an app to track catch, discards, and effort on trips for Atlantic red snapper (and/or other reef fish).
    - Increased access for Atlantic red snapper by recreational anglers over an extended time period to test how angler behavior for reef fish changes with longer fishing seasons and reporting requirements.

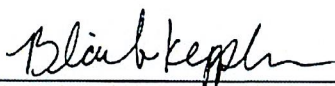
- Outreach materials would be created to help people understand the recreational fishing components of the EFP for each state and what anglers need to do to participate.
- In the near term, states will need:
  - Approval from NOAA for each state's proposed EFP program.
- To make state management of Atlantic red snapper a success, in the long term, states will need:
  - 1) Monetary support is important to support state agencies in formally implementing state management of Atlantic red snapper.
    - If funds are available, either the state or the Council (not NOAA Fisheries) should be the designated party to approve the spend plan.
  - 2) Flexibility to implement state management that allows meaningful access for recreational fishermen.

Signed,



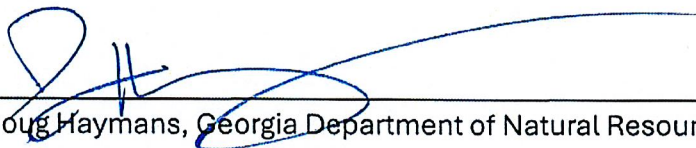
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Kathy Rawls, North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality - Division of Marine Fisheries Management



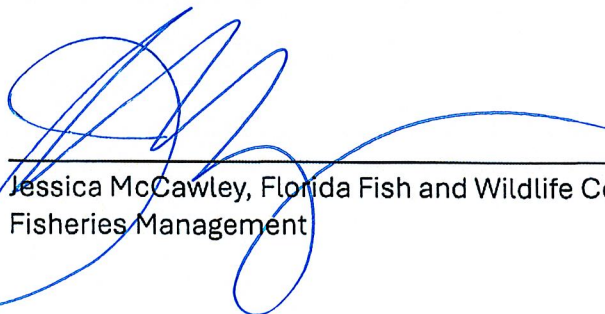
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Blaik Keppler, South Carolina Department of Natural Resources - Marine Resources Division



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Doug Haymans, Georgia Department of Natural Resources - Coastal Resources Division



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Jessica McCawley, Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission - Division of Marine Fisheries Management