

Coastal Conservation Association
Position Statement

Red Snapper Management

Red snapper stocks in the Gulf of Mexico have been decimated as bycatch of juvenile red snapper in shrimp trawls has remained unchecked for more than two decades. As a result, the red snapper population today is severely depleted and requires drastic management action to recover the stock. A decade ago, as the National Marine Fisheries Service assured CCA that measures to reduce bycatch were in place, anglers looked to increases in recreational limits in the coming years. Instead we are now faced with greater reductions and no solid proposal to reduce trawl bycatch. CCA filed a petition with the U.S. Secretary of Commerce and a lawsuit in U.S. Federal District Court seeking significant red snapper bycatch reduction by the shrimp fleet through sensible conservation measures including bycatch quotas, area or seasonal shrimping closures and meaningful shrimp trawl effort reductions.

Despite a host of other factors impacting this fishery, the fact remains that without reducing shrimp trawl bycatch, successful red snapper conservation will never be a reality.

Therefore, CCA has taken the following position regarding any proposed management plans for the red snapper fishery:

- CCA demands that the National Marine Fisheries Service institute measures to reduce red snapper bycatch in shrimp trawls on the order of 50-80 percent from historic highs and develop a mechanism to ensure that this mandate is applied and enforced.
- CCA demands no proposed reduction in the total allowable catch (TAC) for the directed fishery without simultaneous, significant management action to reduce red snapper bycatch by the shrimp industry. CCA is extremely disappointed that recreational anglers may have to endure yet another reduction in TAC and is dissatisfied that the lack of enforcement of shrimp trawl bycatch reduction measures over the past two decades has likely made a reduction in TAC a biological necessity to recover the stock. CCA is adamant that steps be taken so that recreational anglers are not put in the position of having to carry the burden of recovering this stock ever again.

In addition, CCA has serious concerns about any proposal to reduce the commercial size limit to 13 inches. A size-limit reduction means significantly greater numbers of smaller fish could be removed from the stock to achieve the commercial quota in pounds. The result of such removals will likely have long-term negative consequences for the stock. Any proposal to reduce the commercial size limit must be accompanied by an action to restrict commercial harvest to deeper, offshore waters. CCA recognizes the need to reduce bycatch mortality in the directed fishery, but rejects lowering the commercial size limit without action to separate commercial and recreational fishing activity. Such separation is necessary to eliminate the possibility that the nearshore reefs and structures most frequently targeted by recreational anglers will be stripped of legal sized fish by commercial fishing operations during the four months prior to the opening of the recreational season.