



Southern Offshore Fishing Association, Inc.

A NON-PROFIT CORPORATION

P.O. Box 86537
Madeira Beach, Florida 33738
(727) 393-8780

The Southern Offshore Fishing Association (SOFA), with a number of commercial and recreational associations, does not believe the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) Gag stock assessment.

The facts are that both the commercial and the recreational fishers who use the resource are all telling NMFS that something is VERY wrong with those assessments. The assessments do not reflect what is really happening in the Gulf.

The agency has not been able to find the problem. A number of industry representatives have banded together putting up money to help NMFS find the problem. The problem runs deep.

If we look back, this is what we see:

1. Red Snapper are taking over the bottom. Current testimony is that there are more Red Snapper in the Gulf now than in the last 20 years. Commercial boats are discarding 1000s of lbs. Of legal snapper a trip because we cannot get away from them ... 80% of them are dead.
2. A few years back, NMFS slated a 39% reduction in Red Grouper harvest. NMFS whittled that plan to 8% after SOFA hired a scientist to demonstrate faulty NMFS stock assessments. The 8% plan still resulted in a 3-month shutdown of the commercial sector. Three years later, Red Grouper is not overfished and over fishing is not occurring. How about that!
3. Goliath Grouper are everywhere ... eating 3% of their body weight a day. Calculate that for a 400lb fish for a year. 5000lbs of sea life consumed by ONE fish!
4. Deep-water grouper and tilefish are another disaster story.

In our opinion, NMFS has not had a success story yet, but they continue to move forward. NMFS is willing to put a severe economic impact on everyone ... using suspect data. We have a plan to review the science and the models using independent experts. We intend to form a coalition of Recreational and Commercial Industry to speak with our Washington legislators and fisheries subcommittee to assist us in stopping the madness.

If NMFS continues with the reduction, the industry coalition is going to seek economic relief like the farmers. There is a provision in the Fisheries act for disaster aid. The magnitude of aid to the Recreational and Commercial sectors could be in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Testimony at the Gulf council meeting will attest to this.

There has been talk of legal action, but we know from experience that legal action costs a lot and takes years, and we need to get this done before these rules take effect in 2009. This multi-faceted approach will cost money. The experts and lobbyists needed to guide us through these areas will not be free. We must work on all these fronts at the same time.

We ask your help in funding this effort. We will put all donated monies into a separate Grouper Defense Fund, used only for defense of Grouper fishing in the Gulf of Mexico. We are asking fish houses, fishing vessel owners and career fisher-people to give what they can afford. Now is the time to make our stand and fix the problems or we will be back again and again.

To be honest, if we do not prevail, the commercial sector will be in multi-month closures in 2009. Evaluate what a 6-month closure of grouper would do to you!

If you can help, please send a check or money order:

Payable to:
Southern Offshore Fishing Association (SOFA)
(Grouper Defense Fund in memo)

Send To:
Fishermen's Ideal Supply House
Attn: Mike Dunsizer (SOFA Treasurer)
750 E. Welch Causeway
St. Petersburg, FL 33708

SOFA has a website: <http://southernoffshorefishing.org>. Feel free to visit it and if you have any questions, comments, or want to offer your personal time to help, please call Bob Spaeth 727 643 9558

Regards;

Bob Spaeth
Executive Director
Southern Offshore Fishing Association