



**STATEMENT OF  
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SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATION  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, JUSTICE, STATE AND RELATED  
AGENCIES OF THE HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**

**MARCH 22, 2012**

The South Atlantic Fishermen's Association (SAFA) offers this statement in support of at least \$28 million for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA's) catch share funding line item in its Fiscal Year 2013 (FY13) budget request. Catch shares were explicitly authorized by Congress as part of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) and have proven to be an effective market-based approach for improving the economic viability of fisheries *and* the conservation of fishery resources.

SAFA is a new and growing organization made up of fishermen and seafood lovers from North Carolina to the Florida Keys. We work to protect the Southeast's fishing heritage by advocating for sustainable year-round fishing rules, collecting better fishery science, and connecting consumers and businesses with fishermen to improve the abundance and accessibility of local seafood. We also want to pass our fishing heritage on to future generations.

Commercial fishing in the South Atlantic is an important part of the economy, and local fishing supports jobs and the seafood industry, generating more than \$7 billion in annual sales and supporting 137,000 jobs. Unfortunately, those jobs and economic activity are in jeopardy because current management is not working, and as a result, the commercial fishing industry is facing difficult times.

Many fisheries in the South Atlantic are failing. Total allowable catch limits are increasingly exceeded. Fishing seasons are getting shorter, or are experiencing full closures. In the race to fish, fishermen have been less successful in targeting species, thereby increasing regulatory discards required by law. At the same time, fishermen's costs are increasing and revenues are decreasing. Consequently, commercial fishermen in the region are losing their jobs and businesses, and local businesses in communities that rely on the fishing industry are suffering.

Let me give you two examples of how the current system is not working. On February 25, 2012, NOAA announced the official closure of the South Atlantic vermillion snapper fishery. The fishery, a major source of revenue for commercial fishermen in the South Atlantic region, will remain closed until July 1, 2012. It is the second major fishery closure this year, following the closure of the South Atlantic Golden Tilefish in early February. Both commercial fisheries closed early because the current fishery management plans in place are failing to sustain those fish stocks in accordance with the requirements of the MSA.

Thus, once again South Atlantic commercial fishermen are seeing the inefficiency of the current fishery management system at work. The recent string of early closures highlights the need for us to explore other fishery management options.

The vermillion snapper and the golden tilefish fisheries are derby-style fishing – a dangerous race to fish caused by the uncertainty and inconsistency of the current management system. Furthermore, these derby-style fishing methods resulted in less profitable seasons and costly damages to equipment. It is clear that this approach to fishery management is not working.

Everyone suffers from the current management style – commercial and recreational fishermen, suppliers, restaurants, and the public that depends on fresh, local supplies to fill their plates. As commercial fishermen, however, what is occurring in the South Atlantic has a significant impact on our livelihoods. It is vital for us to have a say in how our fisheries are to be managed going forward. Commercial fishermen in the South Atlantic need to be able to utilize options other than traditional management.

Therefore, SAFA strongly supports the \$28 million included in NOAA's FY13 budget request for the National Catch Share Program. SAFA also encourages Congress to consider more funding for catch shares, which will permit regional fishery management councils such as the South Atlantic council to consider management options such as catch shares that could help save our fisheries. SAFA strongly believes that South Atlantic commercial fishermen should continue to have the opportunity to evaluate and develop catch share programs, if appropriate for the fishery, as is currently permitted by the MSA. Funding for catch shares would give us that opportunity.

What we want is management that gives commercial fishermen flexibility and more time on the water. Catch share programs could provide this freedom by enabling fishermen to stabilize their businesses and helping to ensure a sustainable fishery for future generations.

More effective management options, like catch shares, have been demonstrated as an effective approach to helping fishermen keep their jobs *and* sustain their livelihoods and ensure the long-term conservation of the resource. Catch shares have proven effective in virtually every region of the country. These programs have been shown to increase season lengths, improve safety, increase yields and revenues, and improve full-time employment in the fisheries. Given their demonstrated success in other regions, why shouldn't the South Atlantic continue to have that tool in the toolbox?

SAFA's mission is to protect the Southeast's fishing heritage by advocating for sustainable year-round fishing rules, collecting better fishery science, and connecting consumers and businesses with fishermen to improve the abundance and accessibility of local seafood. We believe that catch shares can help us fulfill that mission, and strongly support the use of catch shares as a fishery management tool.

We also strongly oppose any effort in Congress that would prohibit funding for catch shares or seek to prohibit fishermen from working with the regional fishery management councils to develop and/or implement catch share programs.

To be fair, catch shares may not be appropriate in every fishery. However, under the circumstances, with traditional fisheries management failing, we do not see any justification for Congress to limit fishery management options, including prohibiting the consideration of catch shares, or to take away the right of fishermen and local stakeholders – the people who are most impacted by these management decisions – to decide on the appropriate mechanisms to better manage the nation's fisheries pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

Moreover, the flexibility of catch shares gives fishermen more freedom to make effective business decisions and makes it possible for fishermen to avoid unnecessary, costly regulatory burdens (e.g., regulatory discards), while at the same time enhancing the conservation of the resource.

Like many other SAFA members, I have spent virtually my entire adult life as a fisherman, working with other fishermen, the regional councils, and other stakeholders to improve the management and conservation of our fisheries. We have the experience and expertise necessary to help develop better management techniques, and we take that responsibility seriously. This is not a fight between recreational and commercial interests, as some have suggested. It is simply an attempt by SAFA to improve the management of commercial fisheries so that we can continue to put food on the table for millions of consumers for years to come.

All we are asking is that Congress allow the regional fishery management councils to do the work of managing and conserving federal fisheries, with input from fishermen and other stakeholders in the region who truly understand the importance of this valuable natural resource and rely on it to provide for their families.

In recent years, South Atlantic fisheries have experienced significant declines in season length and/or major closures. We have been seeing consolidation in the fishery since it became limited access many years ago, and consolidation and shrinkage in the fleet continues today because traditional management is failing to keep fishermen on the water. If the experience with fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico, which are similar to South Atlantic fisheries, has taught us anything, it is that traditional management tools were ineffective in addressing the management and conservation needs of those fisheries. But now, under a catch shares management system, certain commercial fisheries in the Gulf are on the pathway to economic viability and sustainability.

SAFA is simply asking for the same opportunity in the South Atlantic – to be able to evaluate catch share management – instead of legislatively being forced down the path of having to try the same failed conservation and management techniques that did not work in the Gulf.

To give you a sense of the success of catch shares in the Gulf, in August 2011, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council conducted a five-year performance review of the commercial red snapper catch share program. The Council's advisory panel unanimously gave the program high marks, saying that catch shares have improved commercial fishing in the Gulf of Mexico. The panel said that all objectives of the red snapper catch share program have been met and that, in some cases, they have been exceeded. The goals and objectives of the catch share program were to stop overfishing, reduce discards, and make the industry more economically viable. The panel said that those goals are not only being met, but that the program has also been successful in other ways.

For example, the Council's advisory panel found that the Gulf red snapper catch share program has increased safety at sea, improved and increased reporting and data quality of fish caught, and increased production for each individual fishermen.

Thirty years ago, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council was trying to reduce the decline of red snapper stocks through a number of management options, such as fishery closures, limiting the number of commercial licenses in the fishery, and restricting the size of fish that could be caught.

Despite these efforts, the health of the red snapper fishery had not improved. In fact, these management tools simply endangered fishermen, who raced to harvest as much red snapper as possible in the short time allowed. They also further depleted red snapper stocks, depressed fish prices, and unnecessarily killed other fish and marine life not intended for harvesting.

It was clear that alternative management techniques were needed.

Based on the Council's findings, it is evident that Gulf fishermen are benefitting from the stability and flexibility that the red snapper catch share program offers. Now, fishermen are able to fish safely, while increasing their profit margins and improving the health of the fishery. The Gulf red snapper management program is proof that catch share programs work and improve fisheries and the communities that depend on them.

After implementing catch shares, fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico were able to fish year-round and provide local, fresh seafood products to consumers. Catch shares helped Gulf of Mexico fishermen cut operating costs and avoid market gluts that drove fish prices down. This resulted in a sustainable commercial fishery and profitable fishing businesses.

SAFA strongly supports the use of fishery management programs that give fishermen the flexibility to fish year-round, the freedom to better manage their businesses, and the foundations to help ensure a sustainable fishery for future generations. We believe that catch share program do those things, which is why we support them. It is clear that the success in the red snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico demonstrates the efficacy and viability of catch share programs.

Unfortunately, despite the notable successes of catch shares in other regions, efforts have been undertaken to limit the consideration of catch shares in certain regions. These efforts would effectively and unnecessarily eliminate consideration of a viable management option, and strip fishermen, fishing communities, and fishery managers of a say in the best management options for their regional fisheries.

Local stakeholders should have the freedom to choose catch shares if they want them. Failing to provide adequate funding for catch shares or imposing a moratorium on the adoption of catch shares is bad policy that exacerbates the problems of current management, as we have seen in the South Atlantic. Such approaches also will not save the U.S. government any money – studies have actually shown that catch shares can reduce the federal deficit over time whereas traditional management continues to add to the deficit – and do nothing to address the real issue of restoring the health of our nation’s fisheries and the economic viability of American fishermen.

Traditional fishermen management has failed, yet by prohibiting consideration of catch share programs, the status quo will continue and our fish stocks will continue to decline. Catch share programs provide fishing communities with an opportunity to rebuild their fisheries and implement a sustainable option that will ensure the future health and growth of the fishery.

Taking away fishermen's access to catch shares is not going to end the loss of fishing jobs, or put an end to fisheries closures or consolidation. Any effort to prevent fishermen from considering any management program will only lengthen the struggle for our fisheries, which we cannot afford. Fishermen already feel like they don't have a voice in the process and failing to provide adequate funding for catch shares or imposing Congressional restrictions on catch shares would be just one more step that will distance fishermen from the fishery management process.

The future of our region’s commercial fishing industry is at stake. We need a sustainable fishery and strong fishing businesses that will attract future generations of fishermen. Catch shares are a management tool that could help us achieve this. We need Congress to provide funding and the flexibility for fishermen to work with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council on catch shares.

Thank you for your consideration and SAFA looks forward to working with you again this year to improve the future health of our nation’s fisheries, enhance jobs in the industry, and improve the economic viability of its fishermen.

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