

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 4, 2022

Richard Spinrad
Administrator
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
14th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Administrator Spinrad,

We write today to share our serious concerns and urge you not to consider area closures in the South Atlantic for the red snapper fishery. While it is important to ensure that our fisheries are managed in a sustainable way, area closures would have immense economic implications in our states and we currently lack the independent data to support the decision. Red snapper is a highly sought-after species in the South Atlantic and major economic driver. In 2018 alone, the 6-day recreational season added \$13 million to the gross domestic product (GDP) for the region.

Over the last 10 years, fisheries managers have been working to regrow the red snapper stock, and by all accounts, these efforts have been successful. Anyone who has been out on the water recently will tell you that red snapper are plentiful. However, the current methods and data used to determine the health of the stock and ultimately inform management decisions prevent us from having an accurate picture of many red snapper are actually in the South Atlantic.

We now find ourselves in a catch 22. We regularly hear from our constituents that red snapper are so abundant they are all people can catch, yet the recreational season this year was only two days. As the stock has grown, and more encounters are happening out of season, more fish are being discarded and ultimately dying because of pressure-related injuries. These discards ultimately count against fishermen, leaving them with short or non-existent seasons, even after complying with all the rules.

Now, on top of a short red snapper season, it is our understanding that there are discussions about broad area or season closures of all bottom fishing to stop red snapper encounters altogether. This decision would be crippling economically for our states that rely heavily on our coastal economy. Area closures would have significant effects on commercial fishermen, for-hire captains, recreational fishermen, and all the businesses that support our robust fishing industry.

Before closures are considered, it is vital that we use the best and most up to date science when making management decisions for the red snapper fishery. To that end, Congress has provided \$5.1 million over the last three years for the South Atlantic Great Red Snapper Count. This study, which began in 2021, will provide independent data on the red snapper population by 2025. To make a decision with such sweeping consequences when we have better data from the Great Red Snapper Count and state surveys on the way would be irresponsible.

We urge you to suspend all considerations of area closures and other significant management decisions until the Great Red Snapper Count and other independent data is completed and integrated in the stock assessment process.


Sincerely,



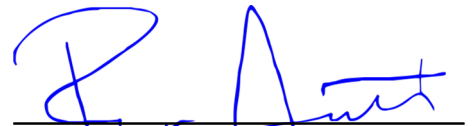
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Member of Congress




Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator




Rick Scott
United States Senator



Lindsey O. Graham
United States Senator



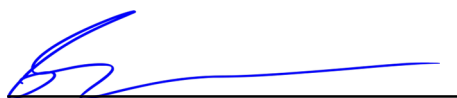
Tim Scott
United States Senator




Daniel Webster
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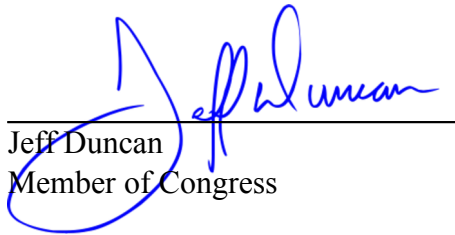
Nancy Mace
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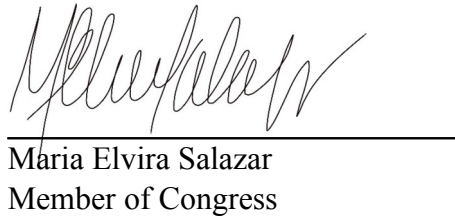
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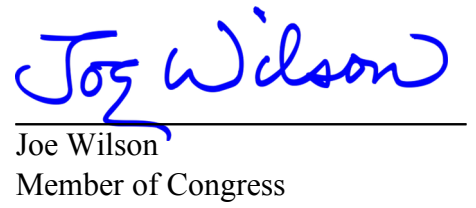
Jeff Duncan
Member of Congress



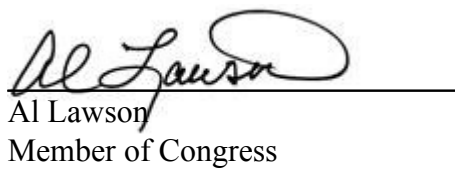
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Member of Congress



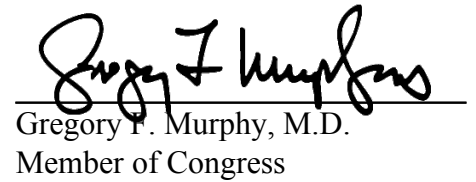
Maria Elvira Salazar
Member of Congress



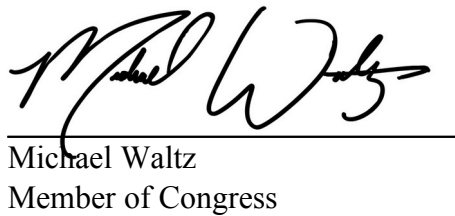
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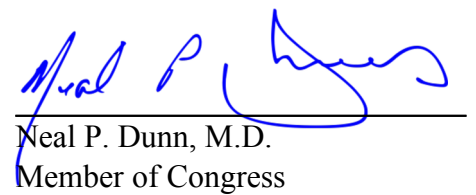
Al Lawson
Member of Congress



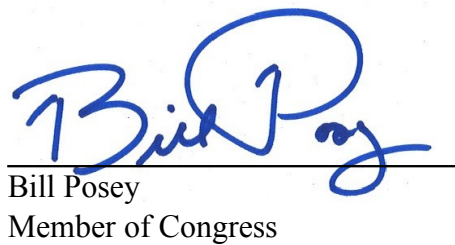
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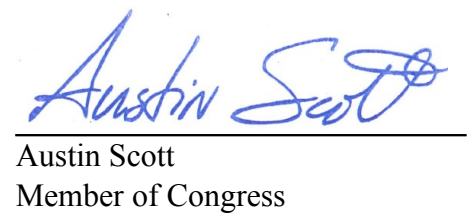
Michael Waltz
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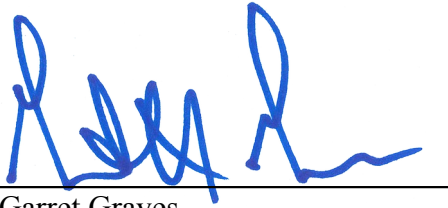
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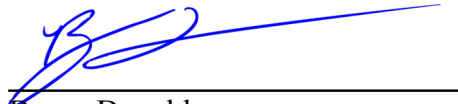
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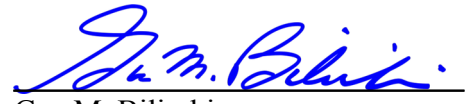
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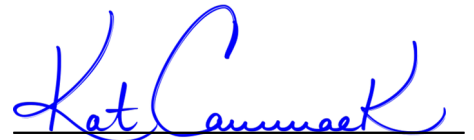
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