



STATE OF FLORIDA

BILL McCOLLUM
ATTORNEY GENERAL

March 10, 2010

The Honorable Gary Locke
Secretary, U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Locke:

This letter is to express my concern with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) enforcement of the revised requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery and Conservation Management Act. Many of the fishery management councils under the NOAA have already begun applying these new requirements, negatively impacting recreational fishermen and the businesses that rely on their success. The result of these actions could lead to shortened seasons, reduced bag limits, and, ultimately, an indefinite fishing ban that would severely impact our sport fishermen and Florida's economy.

The new emphasis on recreational fisheries leaves the impression that recreational fishermen are responsible for fish populations being depleted. This is troubling. Recreational fishermen have historically been good stewards of Florida's waterways, and strive to live within the bag, season and size limits that have been put in place by the federal government.

The NOAA/NMFS Southeastern Fisheries Science Center is responsible for the data collection and analysis that are the foundation of stock assessments in the South Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico and U.S. Caribbean regions. Within these three regions, hundreds of recreationally important species are managed. That is a tremendous amount of responsibility for one science center. Due to budget and staffing constraints, it appears many of these species have never been scientifically assessed. Given the enormous value of the fisheries in these regions, I strongly recommend NOAA prioritize funding for the Southeastern Fisheries Science Center to expand and improve data collection and monitoring programs for recreationally important species. It must be the priority of your staff to ensure these funds are used efficiently to address the most urgent needs, such as a fishery independent data collection and monitoring program for red snapper in the South Atlantic region.

Secretary Gary Locke
Page Two
March 10, 2010

The economic contribution of fishing in Florida is more than \$4.5 billion in annual retail sales. I urge you to fund a data collection system that will protect our fisheries without adding any undue burden to this vital industry. Please take into account that sport and recreational fishing can be done without harm, even in areas where fisheries depletion may warrant some restraint on commercial fishing.

Thank you in advance for your timely consideration of these concerns.

Sincerely,



Bill McCollum