

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 28, 2026

The Honorable Howard Lutnick
Secretary of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Dear Secretary Howard Lutnick,

We, the undersigned Members of Congress representing the South Atlantic region, write to express our strong support for the new Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) applications submitted by Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina to improve state data collection efforts and advance state-led management of the recreational red snapper fishery in federal waters in the South Atlantic.

Despite fishery managers' success rebuilding the red snapper stock for more than a decade, recreational anglers in the South Atlantic have been largely shut out of harvest opportunities. For too long, anglers have faced one-or two-day seasons, a frustrating cycle that leaves them unable to access a healthy and abundant resource even after years of conservation and compliance. The current management system is out of step with conditions on the water.

Although the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act provides the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) with the authority to approve EFPs that test innovative approaches and improve fisheries management, the original South Atlantic red snapper EFPs that were approved by NOAA in May 2026 were blocked by a temporary injunction following a legal challenge. In response, Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina revised their proposals and address the concerns raised during litigation.

The revised EFPs preserve the goal of giving states a greater role in managing recreational red snapper fisheries while adding additional safeguards, including establishing harvest caps which ensure each state stays within its allowable share of the overall catch. To set these caps, states used data from Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission's (FWC) State Reef Fish Survey data, which provides more precise, timely, and localized data for red snapper than the federal Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP).

The new EFPs also align with President Trump's Executive Order on Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness, which directs the Department of Commerce and NOAA to expand the use of EFPs, modernize data collection, and reduce unnecessary barriers to American fishermen. Additionally, Congress has expressed clear support for advancing state-led management of red snapper. Language in the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying H.R. 6938, the Commerce, Justice, Science; Energy and Water Development; and Interior and Environment Appropriations Act of 2026, directs National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to provide the South Atlantic states with \$1.35 million in grant funding to enable willing states to begin state management in 2026.

We have already seen the success of this approach. During President Trump's first term, NOAA approved state management EFPs for red snapper in the Gulf of America, which moved management decisions closer to the resource and served as the model for long-term state-led management in the Gulf. That partnership

improved data collection, strengthened accountability, and resulted in substantially longer recreational fishing seasons while maintaining healthy fish stocks. In 2025, Florida's Gulf red snapper season lasted 126 days, a dramatic improvement from the three-day federal season anglers experienced before state management began. That success demonstrates what can be achieved when states are empowered to lead.

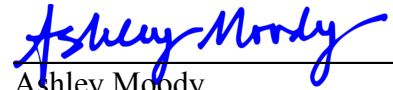
Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina have demonstrated their commitment to responsible fisheries management by refining their proposals, responding to the issues raised during litigation, and working collaboratively with NOAA to develop even stronger EFP applications. These new permits represent an important opportunity to improve recreational access, strengthen conservation through best available science, and support the coastal economies that depend on this fishery.

We respectfully urge NOAA, through the Department of Commerce, to work expeditiously with Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina to approve these new EFP applications and continue advancing state-led management of South Atlantic red snapper. We look forward to working with you to improve recreational fishing opportunities, strengthen conservation through better data, and ensure this abundant fishery is managed in a way that benefits anglers, coastal communities, and future generations.

Sincerely,



John H. Rutherford
Member of Congress



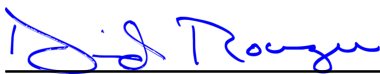
Ashley Moody
United States Senator



Rick Scott
United States Senator



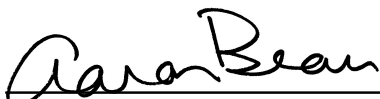
Earl L. "Buddy" Carter
Member of Congress



David Rouzer
Member of Congress



Russell Fry
Member of Congress



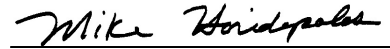
Aaron Bean
Member of Congress



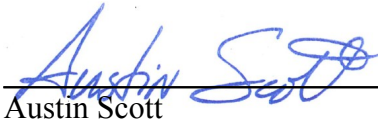
Randy Fine
Member of Congress



Darren Soto
Member of Congress



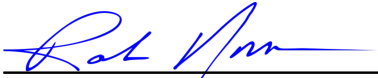
Mike Haridopolos
Member of Congress



Austin Scott
Member of Congress



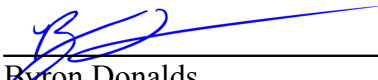
Daniel Webster
Member of Congress



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