

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 14, 2015

The Honorable Penny Pritzker
Secretary
Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Pritzker:

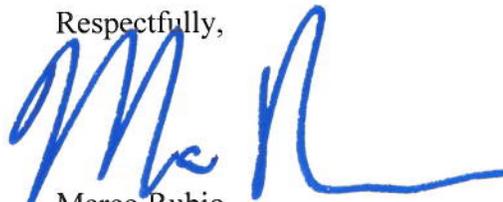
As the Chairman of the Commerce Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries, and Coast Guard, I write to encourage you to direct the National Marine Fisheries Service to quickly implement the Government Accountability Office's recent recommendations, as outlined in the report, "GAO-16-131, Recreational Fisheries Management: The National Marine Fisheries Service Should Develop a Comprehensive Strategy to Guide its Data Collection Efforts."

The report stems from a 2013 bipartisan congressional request to examine current data collection practices used in determining stock assessments. Although the GAO report notes that the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has taken steps to improve data collection for recreational fisheries, the report also states, "NMFS does not have a comprehensive strategy to guide the implementation of its various efforts... Moreover, without clearly communicating the strategy to its stakeholders, NMFS may find it difficult to build trust, potentially limiting its ability to effectively implement MRIP improvement initiatives that rely on data collection partners."

As noted above, NMFS must work diligently to rebuild trust with key stakeholders for more effective management of our nation's fisheries. The importance of having these stakeholders as data collection partners cannot be overstated. Our fisheries support millions of jobs and are economically vital to coastal communities throughout the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic. However, without effective and trustworthy data collection, these benefits will not be realized. A transparent, structured plan with established time frames is essential for a successful data program.

As NMFS acknowledges the need to develop this important strategy, I urge you to use the necessary resources within the Department and NMFS to implement the recommended data collection efforts as soon as possible.

Respectfully,



Marco Rubio
U.S. Senator