

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June 27, 2016

Mr. David Smith
Acting Inspector General
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20230

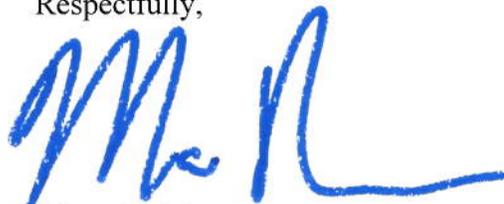
Dear Mr. Smith:

As Chairman of the Commerce Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries and Coast Guard, I write with great concern on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) announcement that red snapper in South Atlantic Federal waters will once again be closed in 2016.

Prohibiting commercial, charter and recreational fishing in these waters is a decision that must not be taken lightly. The economic benefit to my home state of Florida, along with other states that fall under the South Atlantic, cannot be overstated. According to NOAA data, 37% of all recreational fishing trips were taken in Florida. The commercial sector is tasked with ensuring Americans across the country are able to purchase this species, while creating much needed harvesting, processing, distribution and retail jobs. Both small and large businesses along the coast, and throughout the country, benefit from this valuable fishery.

It is clear that NOAA's rebuilding plan is not working, as evidenced by two seasonal closures in a row, and only 11 days allowed for recreational fishing in 2013 and 2014, combined. Coupled with a stock assessment that was not shared prior to the closure being announced, public distrust is at an all-time high. In order to bring transparency and to ensure these important decisions are not being made without taking into account all aspects of this fishery, especially reliable data, I formally request the Office of Inspector General review the Department's decisions and assessment modeling, especially the Beaufort Assessment Model, as it relates to the South Atlantic red snapper fishery.

Respectfully,



Marco Rubio
United States Senator