

September 29, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
1236 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Republican Leader of the House  
2468 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi and Republican Leader McCarthy,

On behalf of the nation's recreational fishing and boating community, thank you for bringing H.R. 5126, Direct Enhancement of Snapper Conservation and the Economy through Novel Devices Act of 2020 (DESCEND Act), to the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives. The DESCEND Act unanimously passed the Committee on Natural Resources on March 11. We urge final passage of this bill sponsored by Congressmen Garret Graves (R-La.) and Jared Huffman (D-Calif.) and thank them for their leadership in support of Gulf of Mexico reef fish conservation.

The Gulf of Mexico's recreational fisheries contribute \$13.5 billion to the economy annually and support 138,817 jobs. The region's recreational fishing community is comprised of 2.6 million saltwater anglers and thousands of fishing-dependent businesses who strongly support healthy marine resources. Part of this commitment to conservation includes minimizing bycatch and maximizing survival of released fish to ensure the health of our fisheries for generations to come.

Red snapper and other reef fish are often thrown overboard for a variety of reasons (e.g., being caught out of season or undersized). Due to the rapid change in pressure from being brought to the surface from depth many of these fish cannot swim back down and end up dying at the surface. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Gulf red snapper are wasted each year. This is an economic and conservation travesty. Unfortunately, a bureaucratic roadblock related to an important oil spill recovery-funded project has prevented regulation from moving forward at the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council that would address this problem.

For fisheries as important and valuable as Gulf reef fish, we should be doing everything we can to conserve these fish stocks. By requiring reef fish fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico to possess devices that help fish avoid the fatal effects of barotrauma, and by clarifying that oil spill recovery funds can be used for related projects, the DESCEND Act would be a tremendous step toward reducing wasteful discard mortality and ensuring the sustainability of the iconic Gulf red snapper and other reef fish. Furthermore, it would align Gulf regulations with several West Coast states and South Atlantic federal waters where descending devices are required on board.

We are grateful for the many victories during this Congress benefiting natural resource conservation, and we hope you will add to that legacy by passing the science-based conservation measures included in the DESCEND Act.

Sincerely,

American Sportfishing Association  
Angler Action Foundation  
BoatU.S.  
Center for Sportfishing Policy  
Coastal Conservation Association  
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

Guy Harvey Ocean Foundation  
International Game Fish Association  
Marine Retailers Association of the Americas  
National Marine Manufacturers Association  
Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership  
Wild Oceans