

September 22, 2004

Donald Kennedy
Editor-in-Chief, *Science Magazine*
AAAS
1200 New York Ave, NW
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Dr. Kennedy:

Time and again, when faced with the decision between conservation and exploitation, recreational anglers consistently choose the health of the resource over their own interests. However, the authors of the study, "The Impact of United States Recreational Fishers on Marine Fish Populations," (*Science Express*, 26 August, 2004, *Science*, Volume 305, 27 August, 2004, p. 1235) would have you believe that the over-fished condition of marine fish stocks rests on the shoulders of the recreational angler. In reality, the study merely confirms what fishery scientists, managers and anglers themselves have known for decades – recreational catches comprise a significant share of some U.S. fisheries. Unfortunately, the authors have made mischaracterizations of marine fisheries by pointing out just the current proportion of recreational landings of a few "populations of concern." What the authors fail to consider in the study is how most of these species arrived at their current condition – years of commercial over-fishing.

For example, in characterizing the Bocaccio as the "poster fish" of recreational fishing excess, the authors say that in 2002, anglers landed 87 percent of the total harvest, or approximately 200,000 pounds. What the authors fail to explain is that of the total 104 million pounds of Bocaccio landed in the prior 20 years, commercial fisherman landed 89 million pounds, more than 85 percent of the total. In other words, over the same period, recreational landings account for less than 15 percent of the total. It is the sustained commercial over-fishing of Bocaccio (see chart) that is the primary reason for driving this species into decline.

The authors also fail to accurately represent the reality of the Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishery. To state that recreational anglers take half of the total red snapper harvest is to ignore the most significant part of the story. The authors never mention the source of mortality that has the greatest impact on red snapper stock recovery. It's not the recreational harvest, or even the combination of recreational and commercial harvest. It is the mortality of juvenile snapper caused by shrimp trawl bycatch. The reality is that even if all sportfishing, and commercial fishing for that matter, ended today, the stock will never recover without addressing this major source of mortality.

In the United States, saltwater recreational anglers are highly regulated by state, interstate and federal bag limits, size limits and seasons, the same tools that have successfully managed freshwater anglers for many, many years. The anglers, and the industry they support, have a strong tradition of supporting and paying for good fisheries management. In fact, anglers and the recreational sportfishing industry alike demand good fisheries management for the benefit of all Americans. This study does nothing more than malign this community and misleads the American public at a time when we all need to be working cooperatively to rebuild our fisheries.

Cordially,

American Sportfishing Association, Alexandria, VA
American Fly Fishing Trade Association, Kelso, WA
B.A.S.S. Inc., Montgomery, AL
The Billfish Foundation, Ft. Lauderdale, FL
Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association, Ontario, Canada
Coastal Conservation Association, Washington, D.C.
Coastside Fishing Club, Pacifica, CA

Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation, Washington, D.C.
Federation of Fly Fishers, Bozeman, MT
International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, Washington, D.C.
The Izaak Walton League of America, Inc., Gaithersburg, MD
Jersey Coast Anglers Association, Toms River, NJ
National Marine Manufacturers Association, Chicago, IL
Northwest Sportfish Industry Association, Oregon City, OR
Recreational Fishing Alliance, New Gretna, NJ
Sportfishing Association of California, San Diego, CA
Stripers Forever, South Portland, ME
United Anglers of California, San Jose, CA
United Anglers of Southern California, Huntington Beach, CA