

PRESIDENT'S *Corner*

Better Fisheries Management Means Better Business

For as long as I have been in this business, as an industry we have been calling for better management of our nation's saltwater fisheries. Why is better management so important? It is important because most anglers are not very good at catching fish. They use tackle that is inefficient and spend little time practicing their sport, taking on average 10 fishing trips per year. The more fish there are, however, the better their likelihood of catching one. And more fish means more anglers which means better business.

Look no further than the resurgence of Atlantic striped bass and its impact on the sportfishing industry for proof of that connection. Anglers are taking 10 times more trips for striped bass today than when the stock was at its lowest level. To help ensure that striped bass endures as a species and as a sportfish, in 2007 President George W. Bush signed an Executive Order declaring it a federal gamefish. Re-establishing striped bass is a fisheries management success story.

Better fisheries management, however, must be accompanied by minimizing the adverse impacts of



fisheries management measures on communities that depend on recreational fishing. It is ludicrous to put people out of business today so that we can provide them with better business in 10 or 15 years—particularly when our federal government is spending billions, if not trillions, of our tax dollars to create jobs.

Right now the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service, the agency responsible for overseeing commercial and recreational saltwater fishing, is considering closing the entire reef fish complex in the Atlantic Ocean to all fishing based on the new red snapper stock assessment. That assessment says that red snapper is at less than 5 percent of its historic levels and overfishing is occurring at 12 times the sustainable rate. NOAA says that closing just the red snapper fishery is not enough to end overfishing because snapper by-catch from other reef fish still would be too high. This potential move comes 33 years after the 1976 Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act was voted into law to prevent this very thing from happening.

Since its inception NOAA has allocated little of its resources to collect reliable recreational sportfishing

data, focusing largely on commercial fishing—despite the fact that the recreational sector creates 50 percent of the jobs coming from domestic saltwater fisheries while taking only 3 percent of the saltwater fish harvested each year.

Closing an entire fisheries complex to make up for the mismanagement of one species is not acceptable. This decision will have a devastating impact on coastal communities and the sportfishing industry when our country can ill afford to hurt either. Now is the time for everyone, particularly our new administration, to take a hard look at marine fisheries management and determine if there is a better way to improve our fish stocks with the least impact on our livelihoods.

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