

Editorials from MOBILE, ALABAMA

# Editorial: Restore common sense to fishing regulations

By [Press-Register Editorial Board](#)

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FEDERAL FISHING regulators giveth, and they taketh away.

Red snapper fishermen and charter boat captains in Alabama and Mississippi may end up with the shortest season in history, despite federal officials' positive assessment of the snapper population in the Gulf of Mexico.

The apparent contradiction between a healthier fish population and a shorter fishing season — with the same daily catch limits as last year — should fuel efforts to change the way the government regulates fishing.

Gulf fishermen got the good news last fall, in the form of federal officials' statements about the end of overfishing. "It looks to me like we have ended the overfishing in the Gulf of Mexico as a whole," said Roy Crabtree, the National Marine Fisheries Service official in charge of snapper regulations.

But Mr. Crabtree also cautioned that because recreational anglers caught more than their allotted share (in total pounds) last year, the 2010 season could be shortened to prevent another "overrun." And sure enough, the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council voted to increase the total red snapper quota, but cut the length of the season.

Gulf fishermen didn't exceed the two-fish-per-day limit. The average size of their catch increased — another sign that red snapper are thriving.

Call it a Catch-22. The feds say the overfishing of red snapper has ended, yet the recreational fishing industry in the Gulf, which has suffered from increasingly strict quotas, faces a season that could be as short as 51 days.

We agree with Orange Beach charter boat captain Johnny Greene. "It's tough on everybody because we have the law beating everybody over the head," he said. "Sometimes common sense doesn't fit in with it."

Congress needs to revisit the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Bills have been introduced in the House and the Senate that would provide more flexibility in achieving the law's goal of restoring overfished stocks. Congressman Jo Bonner, R-Mobile, is a co-sponsor of the House bill.

Federal officials also need better methods of assessing fish populations. The current system hasn't adequately measured the increases in the snapper population reported by researchers such as Dr. Bob Shipp, the head of the marine sciences department at the University of South Alabama.

Federal rules and regulations should have some connection to common sense. Maybe Congress can help the fishing regulators see the light.