



Seafood News - Supply and Trade

■ **Legislators seek to overturn red snapper ban**



By [Christine Blank](#), *SeafoodSource* contributing editor

3/2/2010 2:45:31 PM - Soon after a rally against the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's red snapper fishing ban drew around 4,000 protestors from the industry to Capitol Hill, several congressman are introducing legislation to overturn the ban.

Last week, recreational and commercial fishermen, along with their respective associations, [staged a protest in Washington, D.C.](#) They also met with legislators who support their cause.

“We had about 50 percent of each, from the commercial and recreational industries. It was very heartwarming,” said Bob Jones, director of the Southeastern Fisheries Association in Tallahassee, Fla.

“There are currently plentiful supplies of Gulf red snapper and the ban is hurting Florida’s tourism economy,” added Eugene Raffield, VP of Raffield Fisheries in Port St. Joe, Fla.

Now, legislators and commercial and recreational fishermen associations — including the North Carolina Fisheries Association and the Fishing Rights Association — are joining

together to urge NOAA to lift the ban. The ban on snapper fishing in the South Atlantic runs from 4 January to 2 June.

Rep. Henry Brown (R-S.C.) introduced H.R. 4634, which calls for an evaluation of the economic impact on the red snapper and grouper bans. The bill would also prohibit NOAA from implementing further fishery closures that would have a direct or indirect affect of at least USD 50,000 on at least 25 small businesses, unless sufficient, updated research proves otherwise.

Sen. Bill Nelson (D-Fla.) launched two bills last week. One would end the current ban on red snapper fishing in the South Atlantic, and the other would prevent the federal government from shortening the red snapper season in the Gulf.

In addition, a coalition of commercial and recreational fisheries groups will continue to seek support from U.S. senators and congressmen.

“We are trying to force NOAA to open up and be honest about the science [behind the red snapper ban],” said Jones.

After the 24 February protest, NOAA issued a statement that explained why the Magnuson-Stevens Act should be enforced.

“Ending overfishing is the first step to allowing a fish stock population to rebuild to a level where the stock can be fished sustainably for the long term,” said Eric Schwaab, NOAA’s assistant administrator for fisheries, in the statement.

However, Jones contends that the red snapper limits are not based on sound science. “Red snapper is a fish that we know is plentiful. NOAA is going to avoid responding to the fact that they don’t have the science to close anything in the South,” he said.