

# Congress of the United States

## Washington, DC 20515

May 28, 2025

The Honorable Howard Lutnick  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Lutnick:

We write today regarding the management of snapper-grouper species in the South Atlantic and to express our strong support for a new state-led framework to ensure more effective, science-based stewardship of this critical fishery.

Prior proposals pushed by the Biden Administration on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), including expansive bottomfishing area closures and extremely brief recreational red snapper seasons (just one day in 2024), reflect a concerning dependence on deeply flawed data. NOAA's continued use of highly questionable Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP) estimates has led to disastrous, economically harmful policies that unnecessarily restrict angler access and harm our coastal communities.

South Carolina's recreational fishing and boating economy contributes more than \$6.5 billion annually and supports over 27,000 jobs. From Murrells Inlet to Hilton Head, the snapper-grouper fishery is essential to our way of life and a foundational part of our marine economy. But instead of aligning management with the clear evidence of stock recovery, federal action continues to limit opportunity and erode public confidence.

Red snapper abundance in the South Atlantic has increased substantially. NOAA's own 2021 stock assessment confirms record levels of recruitment, improving age structure, and a population that is rebuilding ahead of schedule. However, instead of expanding fishing opportunities, NOAA has opted for blanket closures and overly restrictive seasons. This disconnect between science and regulation has fostered widespread distrust among recreational anglers and business owners across our districts.

This is not a new story. The Gulf of America faced a similar crisis in red snapper access and found a solution. Under the first Trump administration, Gulf states took the lead in data collection and management. That effort restored reasonable access, improved accountability, and

strengthened conservation outcomes. We believe it is time for the South Atlantic to follow that successful example.

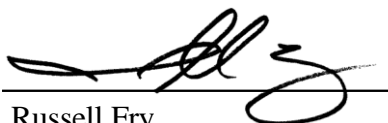
We wholeheartedly support empowering states like South Carolina to take the lead in managing the snapper-grouper complex. State agencies possess a stronger ability to gather precise, timely data and customize management strategies based on local conditions. South Carolina's Department of Natural Resources is already ramping up offshore angler surveys to deliver more reliable landing estimates. Other states are enthusiastically launching similar efforts. This cooperative model is undeniably the best path forward. It has already worked for the many states bordering the Gulf of America. It, too, will for South Carolina.

To that end, we respectfully urge the Department of Commerce to:

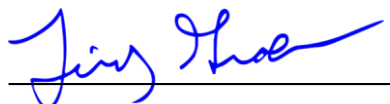
1. **Pause implementation of Amendment 59** and any similar blanket closures;
2. **Support a cooperative state-led fisheries management model** modeled after the Gulf red snapper program;
3. **Empower states to deliver better data**, more balanced access, and greater accountability in offshore fisheries management.

We stand ready to support efforts that improve fisheries management while ensuring access for the hundreds of thousands of South Carolinians and coastal residents who rely on these waters for recreation, sustenance, and economic opportunity. We also look forward to working with the Trump Administration and NOAA to achieve these objectives in a way that allows our citizens to prosper.

Sincerely,



Russell Fry  
Member of Congress



Lindsey O. Graham  
United States Senator



Tim Scott  
United States Senator



Joe Wilson  
Member of Congress



Ralph Norman  
Member of Congress



William R. Timmons, IV  
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nancy Mace". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Nancy Mace  
Member of Congress

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sherri Biggs". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Sherri Biggs  
Member of Congress