

**Testimony Submitted to the  
Appropriations Committee  
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science and Related Agencies  
of the  
U.S. House of Representatives  
by  
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My name is David Krebs. I am honored to be invited to testify today on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's budget, specifically in support of the \$54 million in funding for the National Catch Share Program in Fiscal Year 2012 and in opposition to any provision that would prohibit funding for catch shares programs in the U.S.

I started fishing in 1969 as a teenage boy on Florida's Gulf coast. Boats were mostly constructed of wood and commercial captains had an extraordinary ability to follow the contours of the sea floor with a paper bottom machine. The snapper boats were scattered along the Gulf coast, mostly owned by the bigger fish houses that could afford them. Things started changing in the late '70s with fiberglass boats starting to replace the aging wooden boats, with even a few carrying a Loran-A machine to navigate back to rich fishing grounds. By 1980, Loran-C arrived, with a much more user-friendly display that could be coupled to video plotters and digital fish finders. In 1981, I captained my first fiberglass longline vessel fishing for deepwater grouper and golden tilefish out of Destin, Florida. Fishing was easy in this new frontier of setting a longline across the bottom in 600-1200 ft. of water; so easy that I remarked to an elder captain how easy it would be to capture all the fish to which he replied, "That's right. That's why we must fish harder to get our share."

And so goes the saga of modern-day fishing: Catch up one species and move on to the next, an endless cycle of boom and bust. When the grouper and tile fish played out in my area I switched to surface longline for tuna and swordfish, eventually leaving the Gulf to fish in South and Central America looking for the next rich area.

An early strategy by the government was to issue permits, yet there was no restriction on how many or what size boat the permit was on. In fact, it was well into the '90s before any permit

moratorium started to go into place to try to govern a fiberglass fleet that wasn't wearing out, and that had even better technology such as GPS. So then came overall catch limits for the entire fleet of fishing vessels to try to protect the stocks. However, the fleet had been growing for nearly 20 years. So even with catch limits in place there was still a race to get your share of the resource. To address the fact that there were too many vessels and too few fish, there were calls for government buyouts to reduce this oversized fleet. But that didn't happen, and the fleet just kept fishing. Today, fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico, like those in the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance, are working diligently to correct this situation and improve the economics of the fishery and the conservation of the resource using catch shares.

### **The Gulf Red Snapper Story**

To explain the benefits of catch shares, let me tell you the story about Gulf Red Snapper, a fishery that has historically been overfished.

The management plan for red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico began in 1991. It started as a pure derby fishery with an overall catch limit and a season that opened and closed when that quota was met. Under this system, each individual fisherman would race to catch as many fish as possible during the season. This was similar to the old halibut and salmon derbies in the Northwest and had about the same outcome—short season (less than 3 months), low prices, and a market void of domestic red snapper the remainder of the year. It was an unsafe, inefficient, and uneconomic way to manage the fishery. It also did little to improve the conservation of the resource.

The next attempt was a 14-day mini-season with a 2,000 lb. trip limit that began at the beginning of each month. This method extended the season to around 5 months, and was later abandoned to a 10-day mini-season, which included size limits. The boats would try to make a trip every day, regardless of weather, to get their share. The result was always the same: too much fish at the beginning of the month and none in the last two weeks. Fishermen were increasingly discarding smaller fish that did not meet the size limits and had died. When coupled with closed-season discards that also did not survive, the resource was being depleted. Again, it was an unsafe, inefficient, and uneconomic way to manage the fishery, and it did little to improve the conservation of the resource.

As early as 2001, the increasing number of discarded fish associated with the size limits and closed seasons from both the recreational and commercial fleets began to take its toll on the fishery. This was due to the fact that discards that were assumed to have lived had not. We had to have a better system.

The stakeholders in the fishery, at the Council level, began the process of developing a red snapper individual fishing quota (IFQ) – a form of catch share or limited access privilege program. The stakeholders voted on the program by referendum, and it was implemented in January 2007.

The red snapper fishery is better now than I have seen in my lifetime. It has a longer season. It is better economically. And we are seeing a resurgence of red snappers. The difference was that by, assigning an individual his own quota, the collateral damage was reduced since he could now keep fish that he was discarding while he was fishing for other reef fish species during the other 20-day closures. It is my belief that an IFQ designed by the stakeholders is a very important tool in the fishery management strategy. It is the only tool that allows fishermen the individual flexibility to meet their needs. And since individual fishing quotas are considered a form of catch share, I feel that it is imperative that this tool remain in the budget for future consideration.

### **Importance of Funding Catch Share Programs Such as the Red Snapper IFQ**

The Red Snapper IFQ and other catch share programs have been proven to improve the management and conservation of the fishery, which was the intended result of such programs when Congress authorized them in 2007. Both the Bush Administration and the Obama Administration have recognized the value of catch share programs, and have increasingly provided funding to NOAA so that the stakeholders in the fishery can develop and implement such programs. In fiscal years 2011 and 2012, \$54 million in funding has been requested for the National Catch Share Program. That funding is not only crucial to programs that are already on the water, such as the red snapper IFQ, but also to the development of new programs to further improve the management of our nation's fisheries.

Well-designed catch share programs feature improved monitoring systems and improved and collaborative science, so that catch shares quickly outperform traditional approaches, both scientifically and in terms of access to fish for fishermen. As discussed in the President's budget request, an investment in the National Catch Share Program represents an investment in "improvements in fishery-dependent data collection systems, fishery data management, social and economic data collection or analysis ... [and] stock assessments." These help improve the scientific data necessary to analyze and better manage fisheries.

I urge the Committee to oppose provisions that would limit the ability of the regional fishery management councils to consider the use of catch share programs, and to support funding for the National Catch Share Program.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on this important issue.