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(Original Signature of Member)

117TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R.

To provide that the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration shall not issue an interim or final rule that includes an area closure in the South Atlantic for species managed under the Snapper-Grouper Fishery Management Plan until the South Atlantic Great Red Snapper Count study is complete and the data related to that study is integrated into the stock assessment.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. RUTHERFORD introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To provide that the Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration shall not issue an interim or final rule that includes an area closure in the South Atlantic for species managed under the Snapper-Grouper Fishery Management Plan until the South Atlantic Great Red Snapper Count study is complete and the data related to that study is integrated into the stock assessment.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. CONDITIONS FOR RULES RELATED TO CER-**
2 **TAIN AREA CLOSURES.**

3 (a) FINDINGS.—Congress finds the following:

4 (1) Fishing is a major economic driver in the
5 South Atlantic. In Florida alone, recreational an-
6 glers provide \$14,000,000,000 in economic output
7 and support 119,000 jobs.

8 (2) Red snapper is a highly prized and sought
9 after reef fish by both recreational and commercial
10 fishermen.

11 (3) The 6 day recreational red snapper season
12 in 2018 added \$13,000,000 to the gross domestic
13 product of the South Atlantic region.

14 (4) For the last 10 years, fishery managers
15 have successfully been working to rebuild the red
16 snapper stock in the South Atlantic. There is cur-
17 rently record high abundance and strong recruit-
18 ment within the stock.

19 (5) This record abundance has led to increased
20 out-of-season encounters and discards which is driv-
21 ing red snapper mortality.

22 (6) Despite these increased discards, it is the
23 overriding opinion of the South Atlantic Fishery
24 Management Council's Snapper Grouper Advisory
25 Panel that based on members' collective on-the-water
26 experience, the red snapper fishery is recovered.

1 (7) However, options for future consideration to
2 reduce out-of-season encounters and red snapper
3 mortalities include shorter seasons and broad area
4 closures for the snapper-grouper fishery in the South
5 Atlantic.

6 (8) The State of Florida is concerned with the
7 economic implications of area closures for the South
8 Atlantic snapper-grouper recreational fishery.

9 (9) \$5,100,000 has been invested in inde-
10 pendent survey data over the last three fiscal years,
11 including \$3,300,000 for the South Atlantic Great
12 Red Snapper Count to estimate the number of red
13 snapper (*Lutjanus campechanus*) in the South Atlan-
14 tic waters from North Carolina to Florida.

15 (10) The National Marine Fisheries Service
16 should incorporate data from this survey into the
17 National Marine Fisheries Service stock assessments
18 as expeditiously as possible to better inform fishery
19 management decisions.

20 (b) CONDITION ON ISSUANCE OF RULE.—The Ad-
21 ministrators of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Ad-
22 ministration shall not issue an interim or final rule that
23 includes an area closure in the South Atlantic for species
24 managed under the Snapper-Grouper Fishery Manage-
25 ment Plan until—

1 (1) the South Atlantic Great Red Snapper
2 Count study is complete; and
3 (2) the data related to that study is integrated
4 into the upcoming South Atlantic red snapper re-
5 search track and operational stock assessment.