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14TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

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June 21, 2016

Mr. Kevin Anson
Chair
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
2203 N. Lois Avenue
Suite 1100
Tampa, FL 33607

RE: Recommend Adoption of Ecosystem-based Fisheries Management for the Gulf of Mexico

Dear Chair Anson:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my comments to the Council for consideration in the upcoming meeting in the Tampa Bay area. As a lifelong Floridian and outspoken advocate for the environmental and economic health of the Gulf, I am hopeful that we can boost our fisheries. I respectfully urge the Council to adopt an ecosystem-based fisheries management (EBFM) plan for the Gulf of Mexico to build more resilient ecosystems and ensure the prosperity of our fisheries for generations to come.

U.S. fisheries play an outsized role in America's economy and are vital to the cultural identity of coastal communities. Commercial, non-commercial and recreational fishing provide jobs, leisure and a healthy source of food for American families and businesses. In 2013, the seafood industry-supported 1.4 million jobs while recreational fishing supported 370,000 jobs. The Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) has contributed greatly to these figures by helping U.S. fisheries to be amongst the world's largest and most sustainable. The 2007 MSA reauthorization provided the Regional Fishery Management Councils (RFMC) much needed tools such as annual catch limits and accountability measures to end overfishing and rebuild stocks. By the end of 2015, overfishing had ceased for 70 percent of the 33 domestic U.S. stocks that were subject to overfishing in 2007. Among the stocks in the Gulf of Mexico that were once overfished are red grouper and king mackerel.

The U.S. has made remarkable strides in managing fisheries to make them both environmentally sustainable and economically important, but we must continue to improve on those successes. The MSA provides flexibility for bringing ecosystem considerations into fisheries management. Instead of managing fisheries in an isolated fashion, species-by-species, the Council should take into account a species' interactions with other species, their common habitat and the broader marine environment. EBFM would seem to be particularly well-suited for the Gulf of Mexico with its rich biodiversity and the array of competing demands on its resources. It is important that an EBFM plan take into account the entire ecosystem, reduce bycatch waste, protect fish habitats and conserve forage fish.

I urge the Council to follow in the footsteps of five of its fellow RFMC and adopt an EBFM plan that will help conserve healthy ecosystems essential to the sustainability of our fisheries. If you have any questions or comments, please do not hesitate to contact me or Javier Gamboa on my staff at Javier.gamboa@mail.house.gov or (202) 225-3376.

Sincerely,



Kathy Castor
U.S. Representative
Florida – District 14