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February 12, 2018

Dr. Roy Crabtree
Regional Administrator
Southeast Regional Office, NMFS
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, FL 33701

RE: Draft Exempted Fishing Permit Application

Commissioners

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Dear Dr. Crabtree:

In response to your letter dated September 29, 2017, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) is applying for an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) for red snapper (attachment). The duration of the permit will be for two years, beginning in the summer of 2018.

The designated zone for this EFP is all Texas waters out to 200 nautical miles and includes all sectors of the recreational red snapper fishery (private-boat anglers, charter-for-hire vessels, and headboats). There are approximately 24,000 private-boat anglers, 212 federally-permitted charter boats, and 16 headboats in Texas.

The purpose of this EFP is to allow TPWD to test data collection and quota monitoring methodologies that could potentially be used for the management of Texas' recreational red snapper fishery in the future. Expected harvest levels will be at or below Texas' preferred 16% allocation of the Gulf-wide annual catch limit for red snapper. While this preferred percentage does not imply acceptance of this percentage for future state allocation amendments, it is clearly justifiable as it considers a longer-term average. A longer-term average is more appropriate since the shortened seasons in recent years has altered fishing behaviors significantly. Data collection and quota monitoring will be accomplished using Texas' standard harvest monitoring program and the self-reporting mobile and web application, *iSnapper*.

As part of this EFP, Texas would like to explore establishing a red snapper season that is more amenable to fishing conditions in the western Gulf of Mexico and reflect traditional fishing behavior and seasons that occurred prior to the federally-mandated June 1 opening date that began in 2008. This time period in the western Gulf of Mexico usually corresponds to high winds and rough seas off Texas, creating unsafe conditions for some and causing others to forego fishing during the short federal season. Texas would open state waters on January 1 and through the Parks and Wildlife Commission, explore setting the season for federal waters at a time in the year that maximizes angler opportunity and socioeconomic benefits while monitoring harvest to ensure compliance within the EFP guidelines.

Thank you for your willingness to explore alternative management measures for red snapper and for working with the Gulf States to improve angling opportunities for our constituents.

Respectfully,

Robin Riechers
Coastal Fisheries Division Director

RR:lam

Attachment

To manage and conserve the natural and cultural resources of Texas and to provide hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.