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Congress Preserves Management Opportunities for Gulf Fishermen

(Washington, DC): Congressional leaders took a stand for their fishermen constituents and defeated an amendment that would have taken opportunities out of the hands of fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico and eliminated options for the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council.

Early Friday morning and by a margin of 223-185, Congress voted in opposition to an amendment to the FY2015 Commerce, Justice, and Science (CJS) Bill sponsored by Representatives Steve Southerland (R-FL), Walter Jones (R-NC), and John Tierney (D-MA) that would have dictated that zero funds be allocated for new catch share programs in the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic regions. Congressman Weber (R-TX) was one of the strongest vocal opponents to the amendment. Weber argued that this amendment limited management options already proven to be successful in other regions of the country and would restrict management ideas and options from being considered by local fishermen and regional councils.

“Fishermen in the Gulf of Mexico applaud Congressman Weber and others for protecting the rights of local fishermen to decide how to best manage their fishery,” said **Buddy Guindon, Executive Director of the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders’ Alliance** based in Galveston, TX. “Congressman Weber believes that politicians shouldn’t micromanage fisheries from Capitol Hill, and we couldn’t agree more.”

Catch shares are a voluntary tool that allows fishery managers to effectively manage allocations of fish at an individual or community level. These allocations are set using accurate science, and fishermen agree to stop fishing once those limits have been met. In exchange for being held accountable for every fish they catch, fishermen have the opportunity to develop stable, year-round business plans that increase the quality of their product, improve the safety of their fishing operations, and increase the profitability of their fishing businesses.

“A catch share may not be right for every fishery, but that decision should be left up to the local fishermen and regional Councils,” said **Glen Brooks, President of the Gulf Fishermen’s Association**. “This rider would’ve prevented the Councils from considering this tool even if the fishermen wanted it. We’re glad many of our Gulf leaders agree with us that appropriations riders are not the way to manage fisheries.”

“Catch shares have worked well for some fishermen, and we want to make sure that all fishermen have the opportunity to decide this for themselves,” said **Shane Cantrell, charter captain and Executive Director of the Charter Fisherman’s Association**. “We’re glad our leaders on Capitol Hill see it the same way. Thank you.”

Representing thousands of hard working fishermen and women from all over the country, over 25 commercial fishing, restaurant, and other organizations recently signed onto a letter of support calling for their Congressmen and Women to oppose this rider attempt.

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