

117TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

# H. R. 9373

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.

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## IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

DECEMBER 1, 2022

Mr. RUTHERFORD (for himself, Mrs. MURPHY of Florida, Mr. BUDD, Mr. MURPHY of North Carolina, Mr. AUSTIN SCOTT of Georgia, Mr. WALTZ, Mr. DIAZ-BALART, Mr. GRAVES of Louisiana, Mr. CARTER of Georgia, Ms. MACE, Ms. SALAZAR, Mr. DUNN, Mr. MAST, Mr. HUDSON, Mr. DUNCAN, and Mr. WEBSTER of Florida) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Natural Resources

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## 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 At-  
14      lantic 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.

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