GULF HEADBOAT COLLABORATIVE – 2014 RESULTS

The Gulf Headboat Collaborative (Collaborative) is a group of recreational for-hire fishermen from the Gulf of Mexico who are testing a new approach to regulating their fishing businesses – one that gives operators more flexibility to run their businesses while improving data collection and conserving the fish their customers want to catch. Nineteen Gulf of Mexico headboats are participating in this voluntary two-year pilot program, and we are working with university researchers to analyze our progress.

Headboats are for-hire fishing boats that take large groups of people offshore fishing. Our industry is an important contributor to the economy in the Gulf of Mexico. Each year we provide fishing opportunities for hundreds of thousands of people from across the country.

WHY DID WE TRY SOMETHING DIFFERENT?

The way recreational fishing is regulated in the Gulf of Mexico squanders fishing opportunities and economic potential. The main problem is shortened fishing seasons – some just days or weeks in duration – that cripple small businesses like ours that take people fishing for species like red snapper and grouper. To find a solution, we developed a pilot program to test a different way of conserving these fish while increasing economic stability for our businesses and providing year-round fishing opportunities for recreational anglers.

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS SO FAR?

- **More fishing opportunities for people from across the United States.** In our first year of operation, Collaborative headboats took 103,850 people fishing, including 62,487 people fishing on trips for red snapper or gag grouper. This is a 100% increase from recent years. Our customers enjoyed higher-quality trips, with more diversity of species to fish for, and they traveled from all over the country to fish on our boats (see map on next page).

- **Improved economic stability for headboat businesses.** We enjoyed a 114% increase in fishing trips for red snapper and gag grouper, compared to large decreases in red snapper and gag grouper trips on non-Collaborative boats fishing in the usual short seasons. This is because we have the flexibility to plan trips throughout the year, making the best use of catch limits while providing a stable revenue source for our small businesses.

- **Increased profitability.** Research is ongoing, but data indicate that our program increased profits. This resulted from a shift toward longer fishing trips at lower costs under the program, instead of competing to cut prices and pack in as many short trips as possible during short, unpredictable fishing seasons. Participating headboats confirm their bottom line is improving.

- **Conservation benefits.** A more rational management approach reduced fish discards. In 2014 the Collaborative reduced red snapper and gag grouper discards by 43% and 59%, respectively. This decreases waste and contributes to healthy fish populations. By adhering to catch limits and testing new electronic catch reporting technologies, Collaborative headboats have been able to provide more fishing opportunities with no overages or compliance problems.

SOURCES:

Home Residences of Gulf Headboat Collaborative Fishing Customers - 2014

Based on a survey of 3019 anglers who went fishing on 17 participating headboats in 2014.