



March 1, 2026

Chairman George E. Campsen III

Members of the Senate Fish, Game, and Forestry Committee

P.O. Box 142 Columbia, SC 29202

Dear Chairman Campsen and Members of the Committee,

On behalf of the American Saltwater Guides Association (ASGA), a nonprofit organization representing saltwater guides, captains, and anglers dedicated to sustainable fisheries management through science, education, and advocacy, I am writing to express our strong support for S. 961, the bill to revise catch and size limits for red drum (*Sciaenops ocellatus*) and require the use of non-offset, non-stainless steel circle hooks for certain fishing methods. We commend your leadership in sponsoring this legislation, Chairman Campsen, and appreciate the Committee's consideration of this important measure during the hearing this Wednesday.

ASGA fully supports the provisions in S. 961, which amend Sections 50-5-1705, 50-5-1710, and 50-5-1700 of the South Carolina Code of Laws to reduce the daily possession limit to one red drum per person (not exceeding two per boat), adjust the size limit to 18-25 inches total length, and mandate circle hooks (size 4/0 or larger) when using natural bait. These changes represent proactive, science-based conservation that aligns with the best available data on red drum life history and population dynamics.

We particularly applaud South Carolina DNR's commitment to true conservation leadership in response to recent regional management decisions. This is the most impactful and expedient way to end overfishing and the overfished status of the southern stock of Atlantic redfish. South Carolina DNR has consistently shown it is led by science while navigating the difficult arena of fisheries management. Weighing what fishermen want and what science dictates is no easy task. Clearly, the issue is not only supported by the vast number of fishing guides and recreational anglers but also by the best available science. By implementing the measures in S. 961, South Carolina will effectively maintain the SPR to 40% and demonstrate a dedication to restoring red drum abundance while bringing the South Carolina fishery back to the level our anglers need to continue thriving in their chosen profession. This approach protects spawning-size fish, allowing more mature individuals to contribute to recruitment and rebuild

the stock, as supported by population analyses in the 2024 Benchmark Stock Assessment showing that increased escapement rates lead to higher static SPR and improved age structure.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources (SC DNR) for its exemplary leadership on this issue. SC DNR's data collection, stock monitoring, and collaboration with ASMFC have been instrumental in identifying the vulnerabilities of red drum, including their long lifespan (up to 40 years) and susceptibility to harvest pressure on subadults. Their recommendations for these regulatory adjustments reflect a commitment to balancing recreational fishing with biological imperatives, ensuring red drum remains a viable resource for future generations.

ASGA stands ready to assist in any way possible to advance S. 961 and promote its goals. Through our education initiatives, we can help inform the public about the importance of protecting spawning-size fish, including workshops, webinars, and resources on best practices for catch-and-release to minimize post-release mortality (estimated at 8-10% in assessments). In advocacy, we offer to mobilize our network of guides and anglers to support passage, provide testimony, or collaborate on outreach campaigns emphasizing how these measures will sustain the economic value of red drum fisheries, which generate millions annually in tourism and related spending in South Carolina. We also offer advanced data collection through our app, GotONE!, which can provide validated catch data. Please do not hesitate to contact us for partnership opportunities.

Thank you again for your dedication to conserving South Carolina's marine resources. We urge the Committee to advance S. 961 and look forward to its successful enactment.

Sincerely,

Tony Friedrich

President and Policy Director

American Saltwater Guides Association

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