

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Oct. 28, 2005

Contact: Linda Young, Director,
Clean Water Network of Florida
850-322-7978

Groups ask Sen. Bill Nelson to protect Gulf of Mexico fisheries

Forty six Florida-based environmental and civic organizations sent a letter to Senator Bill Nelson on Friday morning asking him to protect Florida fisheries for the sake of his state's economy and for future fish populations. The Bush administration in Washington is proposing changes to federal law that would weaken fishery protections.

The legislation – a reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act – would also undercut the public's ability to participate in decisions about the Gulf.

“Fisheries are too important in Florida to allow management decisions to be made behind closed doors,” said Linda Young, director of the Clean Water Network of Florida. “We have lost millions of pounds of fish in this state over the past year due to pollution and red-tides and this is no time to relax government oversight.”

This year the Gulf has shown dramatic signs of ill-health. The worst red tide blooms recorded in thirty years fouled beaches with rotting sealife, chasing away tourists. A 2,000 square-mile underwater “dead zone” stretching from north of Clearwater to south of Sarasota killed millions of fish. This fall, declines in our fisheries were further aggravated by hurricane Katrina.

The groups asked Nelson to fight against rollbacks in the Magnuson-Stevens Act that undercut provisions designed to end overfishing and rebuild depleted fish populations in as short a time as possible.

Florida's world class beaches, coral reefs, and the ocean systems that stretch beyond our shores support a \$57 billion tourism industry and more than 900,000 jobs. According to the American Sportfishing Association, Florida's recreational fisheries alone generated over \$7 billion for our economy in 2003. With so much at stake, both financially and environmentally, to turn our backs on our fisheries and oceans is not an option. As D. T. Minich, executive director of the Lee County Visitor and Convention Bureau, recently said: “We need to have healthy beaches and healthy water to be the kind of destination people expect.”

The organizations which signed the letter represent hundreds of thousands of Floridians and visitors.

The Clean Water Network is a coalition of 155 grassroots organizations working to protect Florida's waters. Linda Young can be reached at llyoung2@earthlink.net