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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

GULF FISHERIES PLAN FOR MENHADEN FAILS TO ADDRESS CRITICAL ISSUES
Plan lacks a catch cap and bycatch monitoring and reduction program

*Statement of Marianne Cufone, Executive Director
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"The Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission recently released a management plan for the Gulf of Mexico menhaden fishery. While we are pleased the Commission took the time to discuss these important fish, unfortunately, the plan itself lacks necessary measures to make sure both these fish and our ecosystem remain healthy.

Also known as pogies or bunker, menhaden are a critical part of the base of the food chain for Gulf life, serving as an important food source for marine mammals, seabirds and larger fish. Menhaden are also "filter feeders", meaning they can help clean the water they live in by feeding on small floating particles, promoting better water quality.

Gulf menhaden are the second-largest fish catch by weight in the United States, with over one billion pounds of fish taken per year. The majority of this catch is ground into fishmeal or oil for use in various products like cosmetics and pet food. Some fish are also used as bait to catch larger fish.

The plan details a set of considerations, recommendations and goals for menhaden fish and fishing in the region. However, it fails to acknowledge several critical issues: taking too many fish from the water to fully provide the ecosystem-based services they can contribute over the long term, and bycatch monitoring and likely the need for bycatch reduction.

Research indicates that an estimated 10 million pounds of unintended "bycatch," - other sea life caught while fishing for menhaden - includes tuna, sharks, dolphins and other fish. This wildlife that gets trapped in the menhaden nets likely die unnecessarily.

We strongly support the development of a uniform coordinated menhaden bycatch monitoring system in all Gulf states that fish for menhaden, so that we can track exactly how much and what sea life are caught and killed during the menhaden fishing process. We expect that if bycatch is quantified, there will also need to be a bycatch reduction plan put into place as well.

Further, the new plan concludes that the current fishing rates for menhaden are acceptable, but that is based on incorrect measures for the fish. We should be determining catch levels based on the amount of fish that need to be left in the water to adequately serve as food for various other wildlife like marine mammals birds and larger fish and to provide ecosystem services like contributing to better water quality.

As the Gulf States' plan does not adequately address some very critical issues, we hope the individual Gulf States will implement their own menhaden fishery regulations that include a catch cap, as Texas has already done, and also bycatch monitoring and reduction plans."

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About the RFC: The Recirculating Farms Coalition is a collaborative group of farmers, educators, non-profit organizations and many others committed to creating local sources of healthy, accessible food and green jobs through promoting and supporting eco-efficient farms. RFC is headquartered in New Orleans, Louisiana. For more information, see: <http://www.recirculatingfarms.org>