

United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6175

BETTINA POIRIER, MAJORITY STAFF DIRECTOR
ZAK BAIG, REPUBLICAN STAFF DIRECTOR

September 27, 2013

Mr. Doug Gregory
Executive Director
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
2203 North Lois Avenue, Suite 1100
Tampa, FL 33607

Dear Mr. Gregory:

As you are aware, the proliferation of lionfish (*Pterois volitans/miles*) in the Gulf of Mexico has accelerated since their presence was first confirmed in December 2009.¹ I am writing to encourage the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council to utilize any available steps to raise public awareness of the adverse impacts of lionfish on economically important species in the Gulf. Promoting the harvest of these invasive species may help alleviate some of the burden on the native reef fish caused by the lionfish's aggressive consumption of native fish populations.

According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), an unrestrained lionfish population may have negative consequences for commercially valuable species including grouper, snapper, and some crustaceans.² The listed marine life make up a distinct portion of the lionfish's diet and are vitally important to the Gulf region's economic sustainability, having contributed over \$516 million commercially to the Gulf region in 2012.³

It is imperative that we protect the Gulf reef ecosystems from the devastation this invasive species may cause. Scientists believe the explosion in lionfish populations in the Atlantic ranks among the worst marine invasions in history.⁴ Considerable effort to raise public awareness should be made to defend the Gulf before the lionfish establish themselves at levels similar to those on the Atlantic Coast. An important option to consider to control burgeoning

¹ NAS – Nonindigenous Aquatic Species, *Pterois volitans/miles* (Lionfish),
<http://nas.er.usgs.gov/queries/factsheet.aspx?speciesid=963>

² Invasive lionfish threaten native fish and the environment in U.S. Atlantic coastal waters,
<http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/lionfish.html>

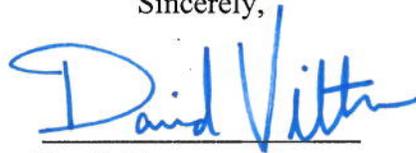
³ Invasive Lionfish Diet Could Impact Native Coral Reef Fishes,
<http://oceanservice.noaa.gov/news/weeklynews/dec09/lionfishdiet.html>; NOAA Office of Science and Technology, Annual Commercial Landing Statistics <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/commercial-fisheries/commercial-landings/annual-landings/index>

⁴ Christie Wilcox, The Worst Marine Invasion Ever, July 1, 2013
http://www.slate.com/articles/health_and_science/science/2013/07/lionfish_invasion_the_invasive_fish_are_eating_so_many_native_species_that.single.html

populations is promoting the harvest of lionfish, particularly to the more than four million recreational anglers who fish the Gulf region each year.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important issue. Please contact Rebecca Louviere on my staff at the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public works at (202) 224-6176 if you have any further questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Vitter". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

David Vitter
Ranking Member
Environment and Public Works