

For immediate release:

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FOUNDER/EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF RECREATIONAL FISHING ALLIANCE TO STEP DOWN AFTER 25 YEARS OF SERVICE TO SALTWATER ANGLERS

July 2, 2021 - After 25 years at the helm of one of the very first and most effective political action organizations fighting for the rights of U.S. saltwater anglers, Jim Donofrio will officially step down as Executive Director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) on December 31, 2021.

In a letter submitted to the RFA Board of Directors (Board) dated July 2, the 72-year-old Donofrio announced his plan to retire at the end of the year, saying he was looking forward to more time fishing, hunting with his dog Joplin, and spending time with family and friends. His official letter of resignation outlines many of the RFA victories in the recreational fishing community since RFA was first established in 1996, while thanking the Board for their guidance and crediting national members, sponsors and supporters for work on behalf of the RFA's quarter-century old mission, *"To safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs and ensure the long-term sustainability of U.S. saltwater fisheries."*

Donofrio is credited with creating the first IRS recognized 501(c)(4) political action organization focused squarely on the needs of saltwater anglers, the recreational fishing industry and the marine resources. His unique vision to provide the community with a political voice at the state and national level was something unique to the legislative and regulatory process that governs how recreational fisheries, and fishermen, are managed.

"No one has fought harder for the rights of the saltwater angler," said Viking President and CEO Pat Healey, adding "Jim has been an incredible asset for us, and the RFA wouldn't be what it is today without him. We can't thank Jim enough for all he has done."

A full-time professional captain in the 1990's, Donofrio was logging hundreds of onboard hours per year when he became intimately aware of how regulations impact coastal fishermen, businesses owners, manufacturers and retailers. The value of his experience as a captain became apparent as he and the RFA grew into a disruptive force when engaged in battles over pelagic longline gear, a possible endangered species listing for white marlin, and the passage of the Sustainable Fisheries Act which led to the reauthorization to the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson) in the late 1990's.

"I remember when the concept of the RFA was nothing more than an idea along the docks with fellow captains as the idea an advocacy group for recreational fishermen by recreational fishermen was first discussed," said Nick Cicero of the Folsom Corporation, a former Jersey Shore captain himself and now a member of the RFA Board. "Jim's vision and dedication to that cause will never be forgotten."

"From day one, Jimmy was a bulldog in our corner. No one fought harder for the recreational fishing industry than Jim Donofrio," said RFA board member and White Marlin Open tournament director Jim Motsko. "He was effective because he did it and saw it; he was on the water. He is going to be deeply missed."

After founding RFA in 1996, Donofrio went on to establish and maintain strong working relationships with members of Congress - on both sides of the aisle - as well as fishery managers and scientists. Recognizing that coastal fishing issues were non-partisan in nature, Donofrio worked effectively alongside democrats

and republicans alike and was invited to testify before Congress numerous times on behalf of the recreational fishing community.

“I am sad to see Jim Donofrio leave the RFA after many years of serving fishermen in the state of New Jersey and across the nation,” said Congressman Jeff Van Drew (R-NJ). “He was a vital resource for our fishermen, and we had the good fortune to work on issues that beneficially impacted the state of New Jersey. I wish him the very best in his future endeavors.”

MARTIN PETERS QUOTE

As someone who made a living on the water for much of his career, Donofrio was also able to maintain close working relationships with members of the commercial fishing sector, even as the two sides battled over gear and fish allocation issues. After spearheading national rallies on Capitol Hill attended by thousands of commercial and recreational fishermen seeking Magnuson reform, even those on the opposing end of RFA efforts came to respect his tenacious but fair approach in fighting for the recreational community.

“It’s still remarkable to me that Jimmy went from fishing captain to Capitol Hill, launching what pretty much became the NRA for recreational fishing while creating a model for political action at the grassroots level of fishing,” said Jim Hutchinson, Jr., managing editor of *The Fisherman Magazine*. “Jimmy always understood that politics have a huge impact on recreational fishing. He’s not what you call a shy man, and that persistence at all levels of government staved off a lot of dangerous and restrictive regulatory concepts and measures.”

According to the RFA, Donofrio will continue to lead the political action team through the end of 2021 and will further assist the Board with the organizational transition into 2022.

John DePersenaire
Recreational Fishing Alliance

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