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## Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office  
Southern District of Texas

Kenneth Magidson • United States Attorney

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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### Corpus Christi Man Convicted for Illegally Selling Red Snapper

CORPUS CHRISTI, Texas – A 30-year-old Corpus Christi man has entered a guilty plea to violations of the Lacey Act, announced U.S. Attorney Kenneth Magidson along with Special Agent in Charge Nicholas Chavez of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Christopher James Garcia admitted he violated federal law by not reporting the sale of more than 1000 pounds of red snapper caught in the waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

"This case and conviction are the result of successful cooperative investigation and deliberate collaboration among the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Office of Law Enforcement, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Coast Guard Investigative Services, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the U.S. Attorney's Office," said Chavez. "This investigation and resulting case demonstrate our multi-agency commitment to combat illegal wildlife trafficking, synchronize jurisdictions and bring to justice those who exploit protected marine resources for personal gain no matter their location."

The Lacey Act prohibits people from importing, exporting, transporting, selling, receiving, acquiring or purchasing any fish or wildlife or plant taken, possessed, transported or sold in violation of any law, treaty or regulation of the United States or in violation of any tribal law.

In 2013, a multi-agency task force was organized as part of an investigation called Operation in the Red. The purpose was to identify, apprehend and prosecute individuals and businesses involved in the unlawful catch, possession, sale and purchase of red snapper along the Texas gulf coast.

Red snapper (*Lutjanus campechanus*) fishing is regulated by both the state and the federal government. Under federal law, the red snapper commercial fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico are managed on an individual fishing quota system. Under the program, managers set a limit on the amount of red snapper that can be caught every year, then allocate fixed shares of this amount to eligible fishermen. The purpose of the program was to reduce chronic overfishing in the commercial fishery.

Today, the court heard that Garcia was the co-owner and operator of Exclusive Fishing Texas, a business that sold and transported Gulf reef fish in the Port Aransas area. In August 2013, agents working in an undercover capacity purchased 640 pounds of red snapper from Garcia for \$3,776. Another 485 pounds was purchased on Oct. 15, 2013, for \$2,860. On both occasions, Garcia transported the fish from Port Aransas to meet the agents in San Antonio.

Garcia violated federal law by not reporting the catches towards his individual fishing quota. Garcia also violated state law by failing to obtain a wholesale truck dealer's fish license.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Jason B. Libby accepted the guilty plea today and sentencing is set for Dec. 11, 2015, before U.S. District Judge Nelva Gonzales Ramos. At that time, he faces up to five years imprisonment and a \$20,000 maximum fine as well as up to three years on supervised release. Garcia was permitted to remain on bond pending that hearing.

The investigation leading to the criminal charges was a collaborative effort between FWS, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Coast Guard Investigative Service and National Marine Fisheries Service. Assistant U.S. Attorney Hugo R. Martinez is prosecuting the case.

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