

March 21, 2018

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204 U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Opposition to H.R. 200 and other bills that weaken Magnuson-Stevens Act's conservation provisions

Dear Speaker Ryan and Leader Pelosi:

The undersigned organizations and individuals are united in their opposition to H.R. 200, a bill to reauthorize and amend the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act). The Magnuson-Stevens Act is working to restore fish populations and the coastal communities that depend on them. If enacted, H.R. 200 would threaten this success and the future of healthy fish populations and sustainable fisheries. It would significantly weaken the law's conservation provisions by creating loopholes, watering down legal standards, and decreasing accountability.

The previous two Magnuson-Stevens Act reauthorizations in 1996 and 2006 were supported by an overwhelming bipartisan majority of Congress and have proved effective at ending overfishing and rebuilding depleted fish populations. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, 44 commercially and recreationally important fish stocks have rebuilt to healthy population levels since 2000, leading to more fish in the water and better fishing opportunities.

H.R. 200 is the House's third attempt to craft a partisan reauthorization bill in recent years. The two previous versions gained no traction in the Senate. H.R. 200's provisions would undermine the science-based conservation tools in the current law that are at the root of so much of the success in preventing overfishing, restoring still-depleted fish populations, and stabilizing coastal communities harmed by decades of overfishing. The proposed changes are so harmful that they outweigh any positive provisions in H.R. 200, such as the inclusion of subsistence fishing in the Act. Among other damaging provisions, H.R. 200 would:

- Roll back the law's successful rebuilding requirements, including establishing broad loopholes that effectively remove reasonable time limits and allowing short-term economic concerns to undermine the long-term economic and ecological health of the nation's fish and fisheries (Sec.303).
- Increase the risk of overfishing by removing the law's requirement for annual catch limits for potentially hundreds of species, including some that may be overfished or subject to overfishing (Sec. 204).
- Roll back science-based management and lessen accountability of recreational fisheries (Section 203).
- Undermine bedrock environmental laws like the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Endangered Species Act (ESA), the National Marine Sanctuaries Act, and the Antiquities Act (Sec. 302 & 307). These attacks on foundational environmental laws are needlessly hindering the reauthorization process.

Additionally, the undersigned organizations are opposed to any efforts in other introduced legislation (such as H.R. 2023, H.R. 3588) that would dismantle the core conservation standards of the Magnuson-Stevens Act under the guise of flexibility. The law already provides the flexibility to tailor regionally specific solutions. In addition, catch limits are working, with overfishing at an all-time low. Enacting legislation that increases the risk of overfishing and rolls back rebuilding and accountability requirements would threaten the remarkable progress we have made and would take us back to the days of cascading fishery disasters and plummeting fish populations.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act is working to restore and safeguard our nation's fish populations, marine environment and fishing communities. Instead of proceeding with H.R. 200 or other efforts to undermine the Magnuson-Stevens Act, we urge the House to work together to find broadly supported bipartisan solutions to the remaining challenges of fisheries management. To help ensure future generations can enjoy healthy fish populations, Magnuson-Stevens Act reauthorization should build on the progress we have made, not lower the bar for management success. We urge you to oppose any House floor consideration of H.R. 200 and any similar efforts to undermine U.S. fisheries.

Sincerely,

Organizations

- Alaska Wilderness League
- Animal Welfare Institute
- Audubon New York
- AZUL
- California Marine Sanctuary Foundation
- Center for American Progress
- Cetacean Society International
- Citizen's Campaign for the Environment
- Coastal Conservation League
- Connecticut Ornithological Association (COA)
- Conservation Lands Foundation
- Conservation Law Foundation
- CT Fund for the Environment/Save the Sound
- Defenders of Wildlife
- Earthjustice
- Endangered Species Coalition
- Environmental Defense Center
- Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC)
- EPCF - Global Climate Disruption
- Florida Wildlife Federation
- Flying Fish Company - Sustainable Seafood
- Friends of Atascadero Wetlands
- Friends of the Earth
- Greenpeace
- Group for the East End
- Gulf Restoration Network
- Humane Society Legislative Fund
- Humane Society of the United States
- Inland Ocean Coalition
- Institute for Ocean Conservation Science
- International Marine Mammal Project of Earth Island Institute
- Klamath Forest Alliance
- League of Conservation Voters
- Madrone Audubon Society
- Marine Conservation Institute
- Milwaukee Riverkeeper
- Mission Blue
- Morro Coast Audubon Society
- National Audubon Society
- National Geographic Pristine Seas
- National Marine Sanctuary Foundation
- National Ocean Protection Coalition
- National Parks Conservation Association
- Natural Resources Defense Council
- New Jersey Sierra Club
- Northwest Environmental Defense Center
- Ocean Conservancy
- Ocean Conservation Research
- Ocean Defenders Alliance
- Ocean River Institute
- Oceana
- Operation SPLASH
- Oregon Shores Conservation Coalition
- Pacific Environment
- Restore America's Estuaries
- Sailors for the Sea

- San Fernando Valley Audubon Society
- SandyHook SeaLife Foundation
- Santa Clara Valley Audubon Society
- Save Our Shores
- Save the Bay
- Save the Sound
- Sea and Sage Audubon Society
- Seacoast Science Center
- Sierra Club National Marine Team
- Surfrider Foundation
- Sustainable Oceans Alliance
- The Ocean Foundation
- The Ocean Project

- The Pew Charitable Trusts
- The Safina Center
- The Wilderness Society
- Turtle Island Restoration Network
- Waterkeeper Alliance
- Western Sonoma County Rural Alliance
- WILDCOAST

Individuals

- John M. Bridgeland
Former Director, White House Domestic Policy Council
President George W. Bush