



GULF FISHERMEN'S ASSOCIATION

The largest organization of offshore fishermen in the Southeastern US

June 21, 2018

Dear Member of Congress:

We understand that H.R. 200, the “Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act,” is scheduled for a vote on June 26, in the House of Representatives. Gulf Fishermen’s Association and our over 500 business members remain staunchly opposed to this bill. H.R. 200, would do very little to improve the management of the recreational fishing industry while severely undermining the sacrifices the restaurant, seafood consumers, and the U.S. commercial fishing industry has made to ensure that we are sustainably harvesting fisheries resources.

Gulf Fishermen’s Association is a broadly-based organization that represents over 500 restaurants, commercial fishermen and the millions of seafood consumers in the five Gulf States. Our members reflect the diversity of the coastal communities that depend on healthy and sustainable U.S. fishery resources. As domestic harvesters of an American public resource, we recognize and embrace our stewardship responsibility that resource management requires. We strive for accountability in our fisheries, the same accountability of all users that the present Magnuson-Stevens Act has in place, and we encourage others to do the same. Lastly we speak out on issues of common concern that affect the stewardship of our public resources, and the many millions of Americans who enjoy seafood.

H.R. 200 poses numerous threats to sustainable fisheries management:

- 1) H.R. 200 Risks Overfishing and Imperils Rebuilding of Overfished Species
 - Despite significant flexibility already incorporated into the MSA, Section 4 establishes multiple exceptions to the rebuilding timeline. Congress previously strengthened the rebuilding timeline requirements because many fish stocks were *not* recovering and were at risk of continued overfishing. Without this statutory standard, rebuilding timelines could vary dramatically, **perpetuating depleted stock conditions and harming our businesses’ bottom lines.**
 - Overfishing has been illegal since the MSA was first signed into law in 1976, but the 2007 requirement for annual catch limits (ACLs) truly put an end to the practice. Section 5 waives the requirement for ACLs for a large number of species, including virtually all bycatch species and many fish that are caught in international waters, **significantly raising the risk of overfishing.**

- Repealing MSA Section 407 entirely (Section 12 in H.R. 200) would **remove backstops against recreational quota overages** and allocations that would unfairly reflect such overages.
- 2) H.R. 200 would weaken the scientific basis for fisheries management decisions
- While we value transparency in all aspects of Council work, Section 7 provides for a level of public involvement in the process through which the Science and Statistical Committees develop advice for the Councils that could significantly dilute the role of scientists in the process and increase the politicization of SSCs.
 - Directing that specific sources of information, regardless of their quality, be considered the best scientific information available and requiring the Councils and NMFS to incorporate certain data (Section 27) would weaken the strong standard for science and the scientific process.
- 3) H.R. 200 would impose unnecessary Congressional interference
- Fishermen are deeply involved in the development of catch share programs, which often take years of deliberation with extensive public input. Under current law, Councils can require referenda on these programs at their discretion. Mandating additional referenda and specifying who should be allowed to vote in them is unnecessarily intrusive and creates undue hurdles to catch share development (Section 8). While we recognize that a catch share program may not be appropriation for every fishery, we feel strongly that this management tool should remain a viable option.

We are disappointed to see this bill move along near partisan lines. The reauthorization of the MSA has traditionally been a bipartisan effort that advances the sustainability of our nation's fisheries. Instead, what we see today is a partisan effort to advance the interests of the recreational fishing industry at the expense and to the detriment of the U.S. restaurant industry, millions of American seafood consumers, and the commercial fishing industry.

As thousands of restaurants, millions of American seafood consumers, and thousands of commercial fishermen around the country stand in opposition to this bill, we urge House Leadership to reconsider bringing this bill to the House floor for a vote.

We serve as a direct connection to the ocean for many inland citizens and we take our responsibility as stewards of the ocean very seriously. We stand ready to work with Mr. Young and others to develop a bill that works for all sectors and progresses fisheries management across the board.

We appreciate your consideration of our request.

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[Website under re-construction](#)

