



April 28, 2015

The Honorable Rob Bishop
Chairman, House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Raul Grijalva
Ranking Member, House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Bishop and Ranking Member Grijalva,

On behalf of our diverse network of members, I am writing to lay out our vision for the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), which should build upon the law's foundation of outstanding progress made in federal fisheries management. Additionally, we would like to express our concerns with H.R. 1335, the "Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act."

The Marine Fish Conservation Network (Network) is a coalition of commercial and recreational fishing associations, regional and national conservation groups, aquaria, and marine science organizations committed to sustaining fish populations, healthy marine ecosystems, and robust fishing communities. We believe that Congress must continue to sustain and improve our federal fisheries policy to ensure that all Americans can benefit from productive fisheries and healthy and resilient marine ecosystems for generations to come.

The U.S. House Natural Resources Committee is currently considering legislation that could jeopardize, rather than support, the progress made toward achieving healthy oceans and productive fisheries. We are concerned that H.R. 1335, as introduced by Alaska Representative Don Young, could undermine the scientific and conservation based provisions of our nation's federal fisheries law that are leading the way toward restoring U.S. fisheries and oceans. Therefore, we cannot support H.R. 1335 and believe it is the wrong foundation for reauthorizing the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

Since its enactment in 1976, and through its past two reauthorizations in 1996 and 2006, Congress has consistently amended and strengthened the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) to conserve and sustain U.S. ocean fisheries, the people and communities that rely upon them, and our strong national fishing traditions.

In 2006, Congress passed and President George W. Bush signed into law, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act of 2006. This legislation built upon the ongoing efforts to restore America's fisheries and strengthen coastal fishing communities by mandating scientifically based annual catch limits and accountability measures to end overfishing and to rebuild overfished populations. In addition, it strengthened the 1996 measures to minimize bycatch of untargeted species and reduce fish habitat damage in our waters.

Rebuilding our country's fish stocks has brought significant economic benefits to our nation:

- There was a 14-year record high in U.S. seafood landings and revenues in 2011 (valued at more than \$5.3 billion).¹
- U.S. commercial fishing generated an estimated \$141 billion and recreational fishing generated an estimated \$58 billion in sales impacts in 2012.²
- As of 2013, two-thirds of overfished stocks placed in rebuilding plans have been rebuilt or have made significant progress towards rebuilding since 1996.³ Rebuilding all U.S. fish populations would lead to a \$31 billion increase in annual sales and support for half a million new U.S. jobs.⁴

The Magnuson-Stevens Act has a proven track record for improving the long-term health and viability of our nation's marine ecosystems and coastal fishing communities. While the health of many of our fisheries has been recovering under the mandates of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, some fisheries have still not reached their full potential and thus, there is more work to be done under the law. However, certain large-scale commercial and recreational fishing interests are calling for increased flexibility in the law, which would put at risk the long-term health and productivity of the resource for short-term economic gain. H.R. 1335 fosters this high-risk approach, which could potentially lead to impoverished oceans and fishing communities. Additionally, amid growing concerns relative to climate change and ocean acidification, the Marine Fish Conservation Network supports greater precaution in federal fisheries management, not greater risk.

The Network's priorities for this reauthorization and our asks of Congress are to:

- **Maintain and defend the Magnuson-Stevens Act's conservation requirements and strong science-based management**, including the law's rebuilding provisions and its requirements for annual catch limits and accountability measures to ensure that overfishing does not occur. This also includes supporting mandates for full compliance with all federal laws and regulations such as the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the Endangered Species Act (ESA).
- **Promote policies that support and strengthen our nation's working waterfronts and community-based fishermen**, including improving fishing community access opportunities and other community safeguards.
- **Strengthen assessment, monitoring, and enforcement mechanisms for implementing the law**, through improvements to stock assessments and catch accounting, and timelier implementation of electronic monitoring.
- **Transition to a more comprehensive fisheries management system that protects marine ecosystems**, including stronger fish habitat protections and forage species management and conservation. This also includes measures to minimize bycatch and better incorporate fisheries and ecosystem science.

Implementing policy that advances these goals will continue the job of restoring U.S. fisheries and buffer marine ecosystems against emerging challenges.

The Marine Fish Conservation Network urges Congress to continue the tradition of bipartisan support for the Magnuson-Stevens Act and preserve and build upon its legacy of success during the reauthorization process – for the benefit of fishermen, seafood business owners, coastal communities, and all Americans who enjoy and rely on thriving and productive oceans. If you would like more information, please contact me at rvandermark@conservefish.org or visit our website at www.conservefish.org.

Sincerely,

Robert C. Vandermark

Robert C. Vandermark
Executive Director

cc: Full House Natural Resources Committee Members

¹ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, "U.S. seafood landings reach 14-year high in 2011," September 19, 2012, http://www.noaa.gov/stories/2012/20120919_fisheries2011report.html

² National Marine Fisheries Service, "Fisheries Economics of the United States," 2012, <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/Assets/economics/documents/feus/2012/FEUS2012.pdf>

³ NRDC, "Bringing Back the Fish," 2013, www.nrdc.org/oceans/rebuilding-fisheries.asp.

⁴ Eric Schwaab, Assistant Administrator, National Marine Fisheries Service, "Written Statement on Eight Bills That Would Amend the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act before the House Committee on Natural Resources," December 1, 2011, <http://www.legislative.noaa.gov/Testimony/Schwaab120111.pdf>