



The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker of the House
232 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
204 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Majority Leader
H-107 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Steny Hoyer
Democratic Whip
148 Capitol Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan, Leader Pelosi, Representative McCarthy and Representative Hoyer,

As an all-volunteer 501(c)(3) non-profit, Orca Conservancy currently represents more than 20,000 members and supporters, and collaborates with some of the world's top research institutions and environmental groups to address the most critical issues now facing wild orcas. The organization's urgent attention is on the population of critically endangered Southern Resident killer whales (SRKWs).

We strongly urge you to oppose any legislation, including H.R. 200 and H.R. 2023, that would undermine the conservation provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).

Northwest salmon have been threatened for decades, beginning in the 1940s when gold miners destroyed critical spawning habitat. Since then, overfishing, dams and culverts, logging, urbanization, and engineering of stream channels have contributed to further population declines for our region's most iconic fish.

Salmon declines spell disaster for endangered SRKWs, which depend on abundant populations of Chinook salmon for their survival, social cohesion and reproductive success.¹ Experts anticipate that climate change and ocean acidification will contribute to further significant declines in regional salmon abundance during the coming decades, impeding SRKW recovery.²

After more than a decade of federal protection, the SRKW population has yet to show signs of significant recovery, with 76 members total as of October 2017 — *TWELVE* members fewer than when they were initially listed as endangered. This critically endangered population's survival remains in question and is far from guaranteed.³ The SRKW population needs to exceed 150 mem-

¹ Center for Biological Diversity, Petition to Revise the Critical Habitat Designation for the Southern Resident Killer Whale (*Orcinus orca*) under the Endangered Species Act 5 (Jan. 16, 2014).

² See, e.g. Lisa G. Crozier et al., Predicting Differential Effects of Climate Change at the Population Level with Life-Cycle Models of Spring Chinook Salmon, 14 GLOBAL CHANGE BIOLOGY 236, 237, 247 (2008) (predicting that global warming and changing ocean conditions will lower survival and fertility among all populations of Pacific salmon (*Oncorhynchus* spp.))

³ Olesiuk, P. F., M. A. Bigg and G. M. Ellis. 1990. Life history and population dynamics of resident killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) in the coastal waters of British Columbia and Washington State. Report of the International Whaling Commission (Special Issue 12):209-243. Estimates neonate mortality between 37-50%.

bers to be down-listed from its status as endangered, and would need to grow far more to reach historical levels estimated at 225-300⁴, or more likely 1-2,000.

Any legislation that would weaken the management of West Coast fisheries, including salmon, should not move forward.

Orca Conservancy opposes H.R. 200 and H.R. 2023, which would increase the risk of overfishing and threaten the progress we've made on rebuilding vulnerable fish populations. They would undermine years of strong science-based management that is helping stabilize fishing businesses and coastal communities.

These bills would extend the timelines for plans to rebuild vulnerable fish populations, delaying when fishermen would benefit from a fully healthy stock. They also would exempt many fish populations from science-based annual catch limits designed to prevent overfishing; H.R. 2023 would allow this exemption for the substantial majority of managed fish populations.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act is helping end fishing at unsustainable rates and put a variety of local species on the road to recovery. Here on the West Coast, for instance, seven species of ground fish have been rebuilt years ahead of schedule because of the Magnuson-Stevens Act — strong evidence that fisheries management can work.

Based on the natural history and behavior of the endangered SRKWs it is imperative that prey species, specifically Chinook salmon, are of sufficient quality and quantity to support not only individual growth, reproduction, and development, but the overall growth of this population. Prey depletion is recognized as one of the major threats to the survival and recovery of the SRKW community, and rebuilding depleted salmon stocks is a top priority for the population.⁵

We urge you to oppose H.R. 200 and H.R. 2023, and any other legislation that would undermine the conservation requirements that have been critical to the success of the Magnuson Stevens Act.

Sincerely



Shari L. Tarantino
President, Board of Directors

⁴ Palo (1972) put forth a tentative estimate of 225- 300 whales for Puget Sound and the Georgia Basin in 1970 (Palo, G. J. 1972. Notes on the natural history of the killer whale *Orcinus orca* in Washington State. Murrelet 53:22-24)

⁵ National Marine Fisheries Service. 2008. Recovery Plan for Southern Resident Killer Whales (*Orcinus orca*). National Marine Fisheries Service, Northwest Region, Seattle, Washington.