



Position Statement: Reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act

Upholding a Legacy of Success

From its beginnings 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. marine fisheries, the people and communities that rely upon them, and our strong national fishing traditions.^{1 2}

Less than a decade ago, Congress passed and President George W. Bush signed the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Reauthorization Act of 2006 into law with the goal of improving upon the ongoing efforts to restore America's fisheries and coastal fishing communities to a state of healthy and productive resilience. The legislation mandated scientifically derived annual catch limits and accountability measures to end overfishing and to rebuild overfished populations. In addition, it built upon the 1996 measures to minimize bycatch of untargeted species and reduce fish habitat damage in our waters.^{3 4}

Today, the National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) Fish Stock Sustainability Index⁹ shows we are making steady progress in restoring the health of U.S. fisheries due in great part to Congress' leadership during the last two reauthorizations of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. While the health of many of our fisheries has been steadily recovering under the mandates of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, some fisheries have still not reached their full potential. In New England, the Gulf of Mexico, and other regions, certain fish populations have been slow to rebound, in many cases because of persistent overfishing exacerbated by infrequent assessments and data limitations. Bycatch, or the catching, discarding, and potentially killing of non-targeted species, remains a problem that affects the productivity and, in some cases, the recovery of fisheries in many regions. Additionally, our oceans and fisheries are facing emerging new challenges. Climate change is causing geographical shifts in fish populations, while higher absorption of carbon is increasing the acidity of our oceans – placing many wild fisheries in jeopardy. Furthermore, shrinking federal budgets are limiting the resources we have to meet and overcome the challenges our fisheries and our oceans are facing.

Rebuilding fish stocks brings 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).⁵
- U.S. commercial fishing generated an estimated \$141 billion and recreational fishing generated an estimated \$58 billion in sales impacts in 2012.⁶
- As of 2013, two-thirds of overfished stocks placed in rebuilding plans have been rebuilt or have made significant progress towards rebuilding since 1996.⁷ 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.⁸

American fisheries are a public resource and need to be managed under the consistent laws and policies of the country. 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. With the Magnuson-Stevens Act once again up for reauthorization, we urge Congress to continue its tradition of bipartisan support for this law and preserve its legacy of success. **The Marine Fish Conservation Network believes that we 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.**

Who We Are and Our Mission

The Marine Fish Conservation 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. The Network aims to retain the science-based and conservation measures adopted in previous Magnuson-Stevens Act reauthorizations and secure additional improvements that not only promote the long-term health of U.S. fisheries and strengthen the wellbeing of fishing communities, but also ensure that our oceans and those who rely upon them can successfully meet the emerging challenges of the future.

Overall Goals

To hold the course toward achieving healthy fisheries, the Network will continue to defend and work to strengthen the Magnuson-Stevens Act in order to promote and conserve healthy marine ecosystems, habitats, fish populations, and the fishing communities that depend upon them.

Marine Fish Conservation Network Priorities for Reauthorization

- **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).^{10 11}
- **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.
- **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.
- **Strengthen assessment, monitoring, and enforcement mechanisms for implementing the law**, through improvements to stock assessments and catch accounting, and timelier implementation of electronic monitoring.

Implementing policies to meet these goals will continue the job of restoring U.S. fisheries and oceans and help them withstand emerging challenges of the future. The Network looks forward to working with Congress to uphold and strengthen the Magnuson-Stevens Act for the benefit of fishermen, coastal communities, and all Americans who enjoy and rely on thriving and productive oceans.

For more information, please contact Robert Vandermark, Executive Director, rvandermark@conservefish.org, www.conservefish.org

ENDNOTES

¹ <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/magact/>

² <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/msa2005/>

³ <http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/01/20070112-3.html>

⁴ <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/msa2007/index.html>

⁵ 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

⁶ National Marine Fisheries Service, “Fisheries Economics of the United States,” 2012, <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/Assets/economics/documents/feus/2012/FEUS2012.pdf>

⁷ NRDC, “Bringing Back the Fish,” 2013, www.nrdc.org/oceans/rebuilding-fisheries.asp

⁸ 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>

⁹ http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/fisheries_eco/status_of_fisheries/fssi.html

¹⁰ <https://ceq.doe.gov/> and <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/>

¹¹ <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/laws/esa/>