
FISHING COMMUNITY COALITION



STATEMENT: Commercial Fishermen across the U.S. Think House Bill to Reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Act Needs Work

(Washington, D.C....May 27, 2015) The House of Representatives is poised to vote next week on H.R. 1335 (Young, R-AK), one of two bills introduced in the House to reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA), our nation's primary fishery management law. Although H.R. 1335 contains a number of provisions which would enhance the MSA, the bill also contains provisions that would erode some of the core conservation principles established in the last reauthorization.

The **Fishing Community Coalition (FCC)**, a diverse group of community-based, small boat commercial fishing organizations representing **more than 1,000 independent fishermen and businesses owners** from across the U.S., does not support this bill in its current form. The FCC is committed to promoting sustainable, science-based fisheries management and will not endorse any legislation that would jeopardize gains made since the last reauthorization and the future health of our fish stocks.

"The FCC cannot support provisions that undermine the core conservation principles of the MSA by creating exemptions to the requirements to rebuild fish populations in a timely manner and to establish science-based catch limits to prevent overfishing because ultimately this would threaten our fishing businesses and communities," says **Claire Fitz-Gerald, policy analyst for the Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's Alliance.**

"There are too many communities and fishing businesses that depend on consistent access to these resources to just roll-back the requirements that ensure they are sustainably harvested, says **Ben Martens, Executive Director of the Maine Coast Fishermen's Association.** "It is a simple fact that healthy populations mean more fish in the ocean, which translates to greater stability and a brighter economic future for all fishing dependent communities."

The FCC, like other industry participants, has been frustrated by the lack of data and accountability in some fisheries that has made it difficult to meet the requirements of the current law. However, the FCC does not share the belief that the "flexibility" provided by H.R. 1335 is the answer.

"The solution is for Congress to mandate and fund the data collection and science needed to effectively manage these fisheries, not to create exemptions to the core conservation requirements that have successfully rebuilt more than 30 commercially important stocks since 2000," says **Shannon Carroll, Fisheries Policy Director for the Alaska Marine Conservation Council.**

"Congress should exercise its oversight authority to ensure that NOAA Fisheries works with, not against, industry to enhance cooperative research and integrate 21st century technology into our nation's fishery management programs," says **Linda Behnken of the Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association.**

The MSA is named after two prominent senators from opposite sides of the aisle. This bill has always received strong bi-partisan support because healthy, sustainable fisheries benefit everyone. The handling of the current reauthorization has made it both partisan and controversial. H.R. 1335 doesn't have a democratic cosponsor, was never the subject of a legislative hearing and was reported out of committee by a party-line vote.

The House Natural Resources Committee leadership has so far declined to consider a second bill to reauthorize the MSA. H.R. 1826 (Sablan, D-CNMI and Huffman, D-CA) which contains important provisions that are missing from H.R. 1335, including the redirection of Saltonstall-Kennedy Act funds back to cooperative research and the establishment of new requirements to streamline NOAA's data collection and management system.

"The partisan politics surrounding this bill are truly unfortunate," says **Eric Brazer, Deputy Director of the Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders' Alliance**. "The FCC feels that both H.R. 1335 and H.R. 1826 contain key provisions that will help strengthen the MSA, protect our fish populations, provide stability for our fishing businesses, and promote the needs of fishing dependent communities. We urge House Leadership to postpone consideration of H.R. 1335 until Committee leadership is able to work across the aisle to develop a bi-partisan bill that enjoys broad support by all industry participants and stands worthy of this once-in-a-decade opportunity to strengthen our federal fishery law."

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