

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY BY  
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ADMINISTRATION  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

**HEARING ON  
MAGNUSON-STEVEN'S FISHERY CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT ACT**

**BEFORE THE  
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OCEANS, ATMOSPHERE, FISHERIES, AND COAST GUARD  
U.S. SENATE**

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**Introduction**

Good afternoon, Chairman Sullivan, Ranking Member Peters, and Members of the Subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today about the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act). My name is Chris Oliver and I am the Assistant Administrator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in the Department of Commerce. From daily weather forecasts, severe storm warnings, and climate monitoring to fishery management, coastal restoration, and supporting marine commerce, NOAA's products and services support economic vitality and affect more than one-third of America's gross domestic product. NOAA's dedicated scientists use cutting-edge research and high-tech instrumentation to provide citizens, planners, emergency managers, and other decision makers with reliable information they need when they need it.

Today, I will describe the agency's work under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, which sets forth standards for conservation, management, and sustainable use of our Nation's fisheries resources.

**Progress under the Magnuson-Stevens Act**

The Magnuson-Stevens Act provides the Nation with a very successful fisheries management construct. U.S. fisheries are among the world's largest and most sustainable. For forty years, Magnuson-Stevens has demonstrated that a dynamic science-based management process is fundamental for sustainably managing fisheries. The goal of fisheries management is to achieve fisheries that are environmentally, economically, and recreationally sustainable. In partnership with the regional fishery management councils, interstate fishery commissions, and our

stakeholders, and driven by the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the agency has effectively ended overfishing and is rebuilding domestic fish stocks. As of December 31, 2016, 91 percent of stocks for which we have assessments are not subject to overfishing, and 84 percent are not overfished.<sup>i</sup> By preventing overfishing and rebuilding stocks, we are strengthening the value of fisheries to the economy and communities that depend on them, and also ensuring a sustainable supply of seafood for the Nation in the future.

Our most recent data show that after adjusting for inflation the landed volume and the value of commercial U.S. wild-caught fisheries remained near record highs. U.S. commercial fishermen landed more than 9.7 billion pounds of seafood valued at \$5.2 billion in 2015.<sup>ii</sup> The seafood industry—harvesters, seafood processors and dealers, seafood wholesalers and seafood retailers, including imports and multiplier effects—generated an estimated \$208 billion in sales impacts and supported 1.6 million jobs in 2015, the most recent year for which economic impact numbers are available.

Saltwater recreational fishing is among the nation’s favorite pastimes and is a major contributor to the U.S. economy at all levels. In 2015, the nation’s nine million saltwater recreational anglers took more than 60 million fishing trips and spent \$28.7 billion on fishing trips (\$4.5 billion) and durable fishing related equipment (\$24 billion) while spending time with friends and family. Their expenditures drove \$63 billion in sales impacts, a 5 percent increase from 2014, supported 439,000 jobs, and contributed \$36 billion to the U.S. gross domestic product.<sup>iii</sup> In partnership with the recreational fishing community, NOAA Fisheries is committed to ensuring abundant and enduring saltwater recreational fishing opportunities now and into the future. To this end, I am pleased to announce that NOAA Fisheries is partnering with the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission to host a national summit on saltwater recreational fisheries in March 2018 to chart a course toward future success.

Marine aquaculture production totaled 90 million pounds valued at \$3.8 billion in 2014, with the largest regional producer being the Atlantic, which represents almost 50% of the total value.<sup>iv</sup> Aquaculture production has tremendous untapped potential, and under Secretary Ross’ direction NMFS will be working to expand aquaculture opportunities.

Marine fish and fisheries—such as tropical tunas in the Western and Central Pacific, salmon in the Pacific Northwest, halibut and groundfish in Alaska, cod in New England and red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico—are vital to the prosperity and cultural identity of coastal communities in the United States. U.S. fisheries play an enormous role in the U.S. economy. In Alaska, where I have lived for the last 27 years, Dutch Harbor leads the Nation for the 19<sup>th</sup> consecutive year as the port with the highest volume of seafood landed (787 million pounds valued at \$218 million).<sup>v</sup>

Around the country, commercial fishing supports fishermen, contributes to coastal communities and businesses, and provides Americans with a valuable source of local, sustainable, and healthy food. Recreational and subsistence fishing provides food for many individuals, families, and communities; is an important family activity; and is a critical economic driver of local and regional economies, as well as a major contributor to the national economy. Subsistence and ceremonial fishing also provides an essential food source and has deep cultural significance for indigenous peoples in the Pacific Islands and Alaska and for many Tribes on the West Coast.

The advancement of our science, management, and enforcement tools has resulted in improved sustainability of fisheries and greater stability for industry. The 2007 Magnuson Stevens Act reauthorization provided more explicitly for market-based fishery management through Limited Access Privilege Programs, and addressed the need to improve the science used to inform fisheries management. Limited Access Privilege Programs, while not appropriate for all fisheries, are an important tool in our collective tool box, and the current Act allows for development of such programs to be tailored to the specific needs of each fishery.

Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the U.S. has many other effective tools to apply in marine fisheries management. Yet, as we look to the future, we must continue seeking opportunities to further improve our management system. Our progress has not come without costs, including reductions in near term harvests for both commercial and recreational fisheries in some cases, and challenges remain. Fishermen, fishing communities, and the Councils have had to make difficult decisions and absorb the near-term costs of conservation in exchange for long-term economic and biological sustainability.

### **Magnuson-Stevens Act Flexibility and Regional Approach**

The Magnuson-Stevens Act created broad goals for U.S. fisheries management and a unique, highly participatory management structure centered on the Councils. Given my past work as the Executive Director of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, I can attest to the value of the regional fishery management council system established through the Magnuson-Stevens Act. This structure encourages a collaborative, “bottom up” process where input and decisions about how to manage U.S. fisheries include fishermen, other fishery stakeholders, affected states, tribal governments, and the Federal Government.

The Councils can choose from a variety of approaches and tools to manage fish stocks and meet the mandates of the Magnuson-Stevens Act—e.g., catch limits, catch shares or other allocation mechanisms, area closures for habitat or protected species considerations, and gear restrictions. These measures are submitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and are implemented by NMFS.

Effects on fishing communities are central to many fishery management decisions. Fishing communities rely on fishing-related jobs, as well as the non-commercial and cultural benefits derived from these resources. Marine fisheries are the lifeblood of many coastal communities around our Nation. Communities, fishermen, processors, and various fishing dependent industries rely not only on today's catch, but also on the predictability of future catches.

The need to provide stable domestic fishing and processing jobs is paramount to fulfilling one of the Magnuson-Stevens Act's goals—to provide the Nation with sources of domestic seafood. This objective has even greater purpose now than when the Act was passed, as today U.S. consumers are seeking—more than ever—options for healthy, safe, sustainable, and local seafood.

Under the standards set in the Magnuson-Stevens Act the Nation has made great strides in maintaining more stocks at biologically sustainable levels, ending overfishing, rebuilding overfished stocks, building a sustainable future for our fishing-dependent communities, and providing more domestic options for U.S. seafood consumers in a market dominated by imports. Thanks in large part to the strengthened Magnuson-Stevens Act and the sacrifices and investment in conservation by fishing communities across the country, the condition of many of our most economically important fish stocks has improved steadily over the past decade.

### **Regional Successes**

There are many examples of what fishermen, scientists, and managers can do by working together to bring back a resource that once was in trouble.

Atlantic sea scallops provide one example of rebuilding success. In the early 1990s, the abundance of Atlantic sea scallops was near record lows and the fishing mortality rate was at a record high. Fishery managers implemented a number of measures to allow the stock to recover, including an innovative area management system. The stock was declared rebuilt in 2001. In real terms, gross revenues in New England increased more than six-fold from \$44 million in 1998 to \$287 million in 2015, making New Bedford the Nation's top port by value of landings since 2000.<sup>vi</sup>

In the Pacific Islands Region, NMFS, the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, the State of Hawaii, and fishing communities have ended overfishing of the Hawaiian archipelago's deep-water bottomfish complex—a culturally significant grouping of seven species of snapper and grouper. This has enabled NMFS to increase annual catch limits for these stocks for both commercial and recreational fishermen and ensure these fish are available year-round.

On the West Coast, NMFS and the Pacific Fishery Management Council, the fishing industry, recreational anglers, and other partners have successfully rebuilt a number of once overfished

stocks, including coho salmon, lingcod, Pacific whiting, widow rockfish, canary rockfish, and petrale sole. These and other conservation gains, including implementation of the West Coast groundfish trawl rationalization program, enabled NMFS to increase catch limits for abundant West Coast groundfish species that co-occur with groundfish species in rebuilding plans.

In the Southeast Region, NOAA, the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, the fishing industries, recreational anglers and other partners have successfully rebuilt a number of once overfished stocks, including gag, red grouper and king mackerel in the Gulf of Mexico, and black sea bass in the South Atlantic. These and other conservation gains enabled NMFS to increase catch limits for six stocks or stock complexes and eliminate or reduce two fixed seasonal closures.

I'm most proud of the accomplishments in Alaska where our management decisions have led us to be widely recognized as one of the most successfully managed fisheries in the world. In 2015, landings revenue totaled about \$1.7 billion, a 32% increase from 2006 (a 25% increase in real terms after adjusting for inflation).<sup>vii</sup>

### **Remaining Challenges - Looking to the Future**

Amid these successes, some critical challenges remain. For example, while our West Coast groundfish fisheries have rebuilt several important stocks, in recent years fishermen are leaving a substantial amount of the available harvest of some groundfish species in the water, due to regulatory or bycatch species constraints. We must find ways to maximize allowable harvests that are still protective of non-target species in all of our fisheries. Solving difficult management issues will require us to reexamine our own stock assessment and data collection systems, which we are doing independent of Magnuson-Stevens Act reauthorization, and will require the close cooperation of the states, the regional fisheries management Councils, and all involved stakeholder groups.

Annual catch limits are a cornerstone of sustainable fisheries management around the Nation, but managing fisheries using annual catch limits and accountability measures was a major change and has been challenging in certain fisheries, particularly recreational fisheries where total harvest data can be much more difficult to collect and timely report than in most commercial fisheries. This is particularly true where data is scarce, which is the case for many of the stocks in the Pacific Islands region and the Caribbean, especially those species being fished in the coral reef ecosystem. I believe there are opportunities to have it both ways – to maximize our domestic harvest potential, without compromising the long-term sustainability of the resources we manage. We are committed to working with Congress throughout the Magnuson-Stevens reauthorization process with regards to annual catch limits, accountability measures, stock rebuilding, or other aspects of our management construct, while still protecting the overall, long-term conservation and sustainability of the Nation's fishery resources.

Stock assessments provide the fundamental information necessary to successfully manage sustainable fisheries. Preservation and enhancement of the science used to inform fisheries management is imperative as we look to the future of U.S fisheries and the seafood they provide the Nation. NMFS has made a substantial effort to monitor recreational fisheries and incorporate data from these fisheries into stock assessments. We are applying new and improved methods for estimating total catch by the millions of recreational saltwater anglers, but more needs to be done. Strengthening our partnerships with the coastal states, regional fisheries management Councils, and affected stakeholders to conduct efficient and cost-effective monitoring will be an important component of that effort.

As NMFS assesses the most effective and efficient ways to support sustainable fisheries management and fishing communities, there may be a need to refocus limited monetary and staff resources on core, mission critical activities such as basic stock assessment and catch accounting.

We face formidable challenges managing recovering stocks to benefit both commercial and recreational user groups with fundamentally different goals and objectives. Together with our partners, it is essential that we continue to explore innovative management approaches appropriate to solve regional problems with regional management tools. We must remain dedicated to exploring ways to maximize economic opportunities from wild-caught fisheries for commercial and recreational fishermen, processors, and communities. Some improvements in our regulatory processes may be possible, not only in the number of specific regulations we promulgate, but in the more general regulatory processes under which we operate. The Magnuson-Stevens Act intersects with a number of other important statutes including National Environmental Protection Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the Marine Mammal Protection Act, and these various statutes impose important responsibilities upon the agency. There may be opportunities for more efficiency and consistency in how we interact with those other statutes and, to that end, NMFS is currently inviting public comment on the efficacy and effectiveness of the current regulatory process, including the application of federal regulations under these statutes and to aquaculture.

We also need to expand U.S. seafood production and exports. America's seafood industry is world-renowned and our fisheries set a global gold standard for sustainability. However, the majority of the seafood we consume is imported. Through maintenance or enhancement of wild-stock harvests and expanded aquaculture production, we can position the Nation to make inroads on that seafood trade deficit. We need to stay true to our essential conservation mission, while taking advantage of opportunities to streamline regulatory processes and maximize the National benefit of our fisheries resources.

## Conclusion

We all share the common goal of healthy fisheries that can be sustained for future generations. Without clear, science-based rules, fair enforcement, and a shared commitment to sustainable management, short-term pressures can easily undermine progress toward restoring the social, economic, and environmental benefits of a healthy fishery. There are opportunities to provide flexibility in applying annual catch limits and in using sound science and innovative management approaches to rebuild more fish stocks. Although challenges remain in some fisheries, overall, the benefits for the resource, the industries it supports, and the economy can be seen as fish populations grow and catch limits increase.

To understand where we are, it is important to reflect on where we've been. We have made great progress but our achievements have not come easily, nor will they be sustained without continued attention. This is a critical time in the history of federal fisheries management, and we must move forward in a strategic way to ensure our Nation's fisheries are able to meet the needs of both current and future generations. We also need to remember that practicality and common sense are important as we engage strategically. We look forward to working with Congress on fisheries management issues in a holistic, comprehensive way that builds on its success and considers the needs of the fish, fishermen, ecosystems, and communities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss the Magnuson-Stevens Act. I am available to answer any questions you may have.

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<sup>i</sup> See Status of the Stocks 2016. NMFS Office of Sustainable Fisheries, available at: [http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/fisheries\\_eco/status\\_of\\_fisheries/archive/2016/status-of-stocks-2016-web.pdf](http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/fisheries_eco/status_of_fisheries/archive/2016/status-of-stocks-2016-web.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> See NOAA Annual Commercial Fisheries Landings Database, available at <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/commercial-fisheries/commercial-landings/annual-landings/index>

<sup>iii</sup> See Fisheries Economics of the U.S. 2015. NMFS Office of Science & Technology, available at: [https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/economics/publications/feus/fisheries\\_economics\\_2015/index](https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/economics/publications/feus/fisheries_economics_2015/index)

<sup>iv</sup> See Fisheries of the United States, 2015. NMFS Office of Science & Technology, available at: <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/commercial-fisheries/fus/fus15/index>

<sup>v</sup> See Fisheries of the United States, 2015. NMFS Office of Science & Technology, available at: <http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/commercial-fisheries/fus/fus15/index>

<sup>vi</sup> See Fisheries Economics of the U.S. 2015. NMFS Office of Science & Technology, available at: [https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/economics/publications/feus/fisheries\\_economics\\_2015/index](https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/economics/publications/feus/fisheries_economics_2015/index)

<sup>vii</sup> See Fisheries Economics of the U.S. 2015. NMFS Office of Science & Technology, available at: [https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/economics/publications/feus/fisheries\\_economics\\_2015/index](https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/economics/publications/feus/fisheries_economics_2015/index)