



September 9, 2014

The Honorable Mark Begich
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere, Fisheries
and Coast Guard
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Doc Hastings
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senator Begich, Representative Hastings, and Committee Members:

We are a group of diverse, small boat commercial fishing groups from around the country that support fish, fishermen and strong fishing communities. We're writing to you today to highlight the shortcomings of both current versions of Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) reauthorization bills (HR 4742 and the recently released draft Senate bill), and to outline the course our members and our organizations believe this reauthorization needs to take to meet the potential for managing our nation's marine resources sustainably and supporting strong fishing businesses and coastal economies.

Fishermen and fishing communities are integrally dependent on rebuilt fish populations and healthy ecosystems. During this reauthorization process, we have an opportunity as a nation to build on our past successes and move our fishery management system forward. It is critical that we maintain the strong science-based system of management implemented in past reauthorizations, including rebuilding provisions and Annual Catch Limit (ACL) requirements. However, simply maintaining the status quo is not enough to ensure the future health of our fisheries. We must take this opportunity to move forward, ensuring healthy fisheries and fishing communities for years to come.

Above all, this reauthorization must recognize that we cannot have strong fishing communities throughout the US without robust and well-managed fish stocks as well as strong protections for fisheries access in traditional fishing ports. It's absurd and irresponsible to suggest that diminishing our shared commitment to ending overfishing, rebuilding depleted stocks and protecting sensitive seafloor habitat will benefit our nation's fishermen, fishing businesses or communities in the long-term. What our fisheries need far more than 'flexibility' is stability and opportunity.

Flexibility and backing down from science-based management is a move in the wrong direction. To truly protect our nation's fishermen, fishing businesses and fishing communities this reauthorization must:

- Maintain strong, science-based management, including stringent rebuilding timelines and an ACL process based on timely science.

- Require more comprehensive, real-time and cost-effective catch information and biomass estimates to feed into improved annual stock assessments.
- Strengthen requirements to reduce bycatch, particularly of species which are fully allocated to other directed fisheries.
- Provide stability to fishing communities by ensuring opportunities for access for current fishermen and the next generation of fishermen.
- Move towards ecosystem-based management by providing specific direction and requirements for Councils to incorporate ecosystem-based management, including protections for forage fish.
- Include more innovative approaches to monitoring and accountability including more widespread use of electronic monitoring and reporting.
- Maintain a strong and comprehensive National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process to evaluate true impacts of fisheries management through extensive public input.
- Manage our nation under a single fisheries law by applying consistent policies that prevent conflicting management standards between different regions.
- Avoid disruptive federal mandates for reviews of regional allocation decisions.

We appreciate the efforts in both the House and Senate to begin the important process of reauthorizing the MSA. However, we are disappointed that neither of the current bills/drafts include the measures that are critical to moving our Nation's fisheries forward. A reauthorization that does not include the management issues we've identified above and doesn't consider a range of approaches to address these priorities will miss a critical--once in a decade--opportunity to advance our fisheries management program. A reauthorization that simply reaffirms the status quo, or, worse, moves backwards, is something our Nation's fisheries and fishermen cannot accept. We can and must do more.

Our organizations and the hundreds of commercial fishing businesses we represent are fully engaged in this reauthorization process, and we look forward to working with you and your committees to create a reauthorization bill that will ensure a positive future for our Nation's fishery resources and fishermen.

Sincerely,

The Fishing Community Coalition



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Executive Director
Alaska Longline Fishermen's
Association



Tom Dempsey
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Cape Cod Commercial Fishermen's
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