



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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Flexibility Bill A Win For Both Fish & Fishermen

“We Should Be Using Sound Biology & Science” Says Rep. Pallone

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ) has officially re-introduced legislation designed to promote both sustainable fisheries and healthy fishing communities. If approved in the House, *The Flexibility in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act of 2009* would amend the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) to include limited flexibility for fishery managers when setting annual limits on managed species including summer flounder, black sea bass, pacific rockfish, gag grouper and red snapper.

The bill has already gained the bipartisan support from eight coastal legislators who signed on as original cosponsors illustrating that many believe that limited flexibility is needed in the management of rebuilding fish stocks.

"This legislation is the best way to rebuild our fisheries without bankrupting tackle shops, party boats and commercial fishermen," Pallone said. "We should be using sound biology and science when deciding how best to rebuild fish stocks. Unfortunately, the current process of managing our nation's fisheries is based on arbitrary deadlines set by Congress, which has continued to negatively impact fishing communities."

"The recreational fishing community is very appreciative to Congressman Pallone and all of the original cosponsors for reintroducing legislation on this incredibly important issue," stated Jim Donofrio, Executive Director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA). "This amendment to MSA injects common sense into the fishery management process, and allows regulators to improve efficiency while managing our nation's fisheries, yet will not compromise rebuilding or conservation."

As the federal law that manages federal fisheries, MSA was reauthorized by act of Congress and signed into law in 2007 that included rigid rebuilding requirements which currently force fishery management professionals to set annual limits based on arbitrary timeframes as opposed to actual conservation goals. Many fisheries experts point out that the application of these rebuilding requirements has actually restricted recreational anglers from access to rebuilding fisheries, and has caused undue negative socioeconomic impacts on the recreational fishing industry.

"I think creating more flexibility in the MSA by relaxing the 10-year rebuilding period would be a good thing," said Daniel T. Furlong, Executive Director of the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC). "There's no scientific basis for the requirement," Furlong said of the arbitrary timeframe. Furlong explained that so long as overfishing is stopped and other sources of mortality remain relatively constant and recruitment rates for new fish remain at an average rate, the stocks will rebuild to their target biomass levels. "The paradox of rebuilding deadlines is that as the stocks grow and approach their targets, management has been forced to be more restrictive with the resource just for the sake of achieving the deadline," Furlong added.

Language contained in the new House Bill would give the Secretary of Commerce the discretion to adjust rebuilding timeframes only if specific criteria are present to ensure that the conservation of such stocks continues to advance. "Fishing is a treasured family tradition for many residents," said U.S. Rep. John Adler (D-NJ), while adding "for others, it is a source of their livelihood." A co-sponsor of the bill, Congressman Adler said "I am proud to support a bill that recognizes the needs of recreational and commercial fisherman and implements environmental practices that promote healthy fisheries."

Originally introduced in the 110th Congress, HR 5425 had 19 cosponsors and gained wide support from over 100 different regional and national organizations, including fishing groups, marine industry associations, and fishery management councils. When Congress returned to session following the summer recess, representatives immediately became entrenched with the volatile economic climate in advance of the presidential election, and HR 5425 didn't garner much attention. Now with businesses failing nationwide and coastal communities bracing for an uncertain summer tourist season, retailers are hoping that the latest bill can quickly gain support in both the House and Senate to provide customers with access to the resource.

"This legislation and the improvements it would bring to fisheries management are necessary for the long term health of important recreational fisheries and the boating industries," said Phil Keeter, President of the Marine Retailers Association of America (MRAA) which represents 2,500 members of the marine industry. "We applaud the work of the Recreational Fishing Alliance in working with members of the 111th Congress and having this important legislation reintroduced," Keeter added.

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The Recreational Fishing Alliance is a national, grassroots political action organization representing recreational fishermen and the recreational fishing industry on marine fisheries issues. The RFA Mission is to safeguard the rights of saltwater anglers, protect marine, boat and tackle industry jobs, and ensure the long-term sustainability of our Nation's saltwater fisheries. For more information, call 1-888-JOIN-RFA.