



# PRESS RELEASE

## Recreational Fishing Alliance

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### **INCREASE OF FLUKE QUOTA PROVES FISHERMEN ARE RIGHT Pew Agrees - Flexibility Works!**

When the Magnuson Stevens Act was reauthorized by Congress in 2006, key lawmakers from New Jersey and New York successfully fought to include a provision to extend the rebuilding timeframe for summer flounder by an additional three years. Through this legislative effort in the House, key language within the newly authorized federal fisheries law allowed the U.S. Secretary of Commerce to extend the end of the time period for reaching the summer flounder biomass target until 2013, which helped the Mid-Atlantic States avoid a dramatically low quota that could have resulted in a virtual shutdown of the entire fishery.

“Instead of letting our summer flounder fishery collapse and have coastal fishermen suffer through a moratorium on fluke fishing, several key legislators in the Northeast were able keep our rebuilding periods going for a few years,” said Jim Donofrio, Executive Director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA). “Without this deadline extension, we would’ve had no fishery whatsoever at this point in the process, I’m sure of that,” he said.

This week, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) voted to increase the total allowable catch of summer flounder for 2011 to 33.95 million pounds. By subtracting by-catch mortality numbers from within both the commercial and recreational sector, the total allowable landings of 29.48 million pounds for the 2011 fishing year for summer flounder, welcome news for the coastal fishing community.

Apparently, it’s not lost on the folks at Pew Environment Group either which issued a release this week, praising the MAFMC for helping rebuild summer flounder populations.

“Twenty years ago, the Mid-Atlantic summer flounder population dropped to less than 15 percent of sustainable levels, due to overfishing,” said Lee Crockett, director of federal fisheries policy for The Pew Environment Group. “Thanks to a strengthened rebuilding plan, this fish has bounced back and is almost fully restored to healthy levels.” According to the Pew release, a National Marine Fisheries Service assessment indicated that the rebuilding plan is working and the summer flounder population has reached 89 percent of healthy levels.

Donofrio says Crockett’s historical perspective is slightly off. “The stocks were indeed collapsing in the late 80’s due to biological overfishing by the commercial fleet, but what those trawl fishermen quickly realized was that a larger mesh size could allow more escape of smaller fish,” Donofrio noted. “Real-time adjustments in the 90’s and the very real threat of collapse definitely helped put summer flounder rebuilding on track, but giving all the credit to a rebuilding timeline is a bit disingenuous,” he added. Donofrio said the majority of the rebuilding in the summer flounder stock actually began prior to the start of the official rebuilding plan in 2000.

In his recent statement, Crockett referenced a 2009 Pew-financed paper which found that rebuilt fish populations in the Mid-Atlantic would generate an additional \$570 million per year in direct economic benefits, while adding “amending federal law to weaken or delay rebuilding depleted fish populations would deny coastal communities these important benefits.”

According to the RFA, the lobbyists at Pew have missed the key point about summer flounder’s rebuilding track; the only way to keep that fishery open for the past three years as been through much needed flexibility in rebuilding timelines. “The federal law that Pew pushed in 2006 had to be amended to allow the Mid-Atlantic Council ability to keep the rebuilding timeframe going an extra three years, which is exactly what we need to do for all our fisheries,” Donofrio said.

“Pew made it perfectly clear for everyone to understand, whether it takes 10 years or 13 years, if the goal is healthy fisheries, our fishing communities should not be forced to shut down when we can continue to access fisheries and rebuild stocks at the same time,” Donofrio said.

Congressman Frank Pallone (D-NJ), one of the legislators responsible for getting the three-year extension written into Magnuson in 2006 said the Council’s determination that the fluke stock is improving is good news, however he notes that recreational anglers continue to have more restrictive management measures imposed, even as the stock rebuilds. “The unfortunate result is excessive regulatory discarding and decreased angler satisfaction, which ultimately has negative socio-economic impacts on the coastal communities along the Mid-Atlantic,” Congressman Pallone said this week.

“The best way to address this continuing problem is to pass the Flexibility in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act of 2009 (HR 1584), which I introduced in the House of Representatives,” Rep. Pallone said, adding “this legislation will provide a measure of flexibility in the rebuilding periods in order to help keep fishing communities economically viable, without compromising the ultimate rebuilding goal.”

RFA has openly supported and lobbied for passage of the Flexibility in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act, legislation which Rep. Pallone first introduced in 2007. The current version boasts the support of 33 additional bipartisan coastal co-sponsors in the House, with a Senate version introduced last year by Sen. Charles Schumer (S1255) cosponsored by two senate democrats and two republicans.

Last month, a national tackle trade group issued a release on behalf of a national coalition which noted that “a legislative remedy” is the only given option to dealing with today’s coastal fisheries problems. “There are a number groups which originally supported the inclusion of rigid, arbitrary deadlines in our federal fisheries law back in 2006 that are now recognizing that the only solution to the current fisheries management crisis is to amend Magnuson,” said Donofrio, who explained that inflexible rebuilding deadlines, annual catch limits and accountability measures, and a new statutory definition of ‘overfishing’ have all contributed to draconian management efforts on important recreational species like red snapper, summer flounder and black sea bass.

“The need to extend timeframes for rebuilding fisheries is critical to keeping fishermen on the water, which Pew has essentially endorsed with their recent comments,” said Donofrio. “Magnuson needs to be reformed as the national trade groups are starting to recognize, and we need to allow fisheries managers the flexibility to respond to ever-changing marine ecosystems and inadequate management information. It was management flexibility through legislation that kept our summer flounder fishermen fishing.”

Donofrio said even with the best available science, Council representatives still aren’t following the scientific recommendations. “Our scup stock reached the 200% rebuilt target several years ago, yet when presented with scientific justification to increase the catch to an acceptable 55% increase in harvest in 2011, the Council narrowly voted (9 to 8) to take another extra-precautionary step,” Donofrio asked. “Pew is denying our coastal communities the important benefits of this rebuilt stock, and if we don’t amend Magnuson this year to allow fishermen access to rebuilt and rebuilding stocks, our nation will feel those direct economic impacts,” Donofrio added. “We can’t have fisheries continually managed by preservationist logic.”

“Summer flounder is a vital resource to coastal mid-Atlantic communities and we need to continue to work toward fair management of the species,” Pallone said, adding “I believe we need to go further in creating flexibility in quota management to ensure we continue successful rebuilding and avoid overly burdensome regulation.”

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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. RFA’s 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 888-JOIN-RFA or visit [www.joinrfa.org](http://www.joinrfa.org).*