



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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HOUSE COMMITTEE TO HOLD MAGNUSON HEARING Congress To Address Federal Fisheries Reform on December 1

After 5 years of widespread fishing closures, strict seasonal restrictions, diminished angler access and participation, and staged protests and rallies at government offices throughout the country, Congress is finally set to hear debate about problems with the federal fisheries law.

This Thursday, December 1, the House Natural Resources Committee will hold a legislative hearing on bills to amend the Magnuson Stevens Act. The full Committee hearing will be held starting at 10 a.m. in Hearing Room 1324 in the Longworth House Office Building in Washington DC and will be broadcast live via the web at <http://naturalresources.house.gov/live>.

According to Jim Donofrio, executive director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA), when the Magnuson Stevens Act (MSA) was reauthorized in 2007, President Bush signed off on a piece of legislation which was never debated before the Senate, a fact which left many of the fishing community's concerns unaddressed.

"Senate passed Magnuson by unanimous consent, meaning there was no discussion about what arbitrary deadlines, accountability measures, annual catch limits or statutory fisheries definitions would mean to our coastal fishermen," Donofrio said this morning, adding "on December 1, let's hope our U.S. fishermen will get their chance before a full Committee to finally be heard."

RFA has lobbied extensively for the past 4-1/2 years to return the Magnuson debate back to Committee in order to address serious federal fisheries reform, and Donofrio said he's thankful that members of the House Natural Resource Committee are willing to tackle the issues which have left so many boats tied to the dock in the past several seasons.

"There are eight different pieces of Magnuson reform legislation being discussed so it's quite clear that Magnuson is broken," he said. "While each bill has its own unique way of addressing specific problems which have arisen during the past 5 years, it is our hope that Committee members will see the need to pass the most comprehensive reform on behalf of all coastal fishermen across many regions."

Capt. Bob Zales, II, president of the National Association of Charterboat Operators (NACO) and member of RFA's national Board of Directors agreed that there are plenty of good pieces of Magnuson reform now on the table, but stressed that putting them all together into one sensible package was the most important task at hand.

"The current Magnuson overly restrictive requirements are forcing recreational fishermen to seek other forms of recreation and commercial fishermen to seek other jobs," Zales said, adding "this all equates to lost jobs for Americans."

Capt. Zales, who has been invited to testify on Thursday on behalf of the recreational fishing community said coastal fisheries are rebounding and continue to be sustainable. "MSA must be amended to ease the regulatory burden and allow the councils to have the flexibility to provide fair and reasonable management measures that allow fishermen to fish while maintaining sustainable fishery stocks. Providing flexibility to the MSA by passing the combined language contained in the eight house proposed bills the current issues of allocation, catch shares, and other restraining measures may become unnecessary."

"Overfishing is an arbitrary term created by environmental groups and other forces who want to end fishing," Zales added.

Two years ago, RFA posted an article online about the overfishing term (*Overfishing, An Arbitrary "Term of Art,"* www.joinrfa.org) explaining the difference between ‘statutory’ and ‘biological’ overfishing definitions and how the term itself has been used to ratchet down new restrictions. Donofrio said rewrites to MSA in 1996 and again in 2006 have essentially taken management authority from members of the regional fisheries management councils, with the threat of ‘overfishing’ forcing managers into tighter corners.

“It’s imperative that Congress address the lack of management flexibility in terms of regional fisheries councils managing economically vital coastal fisheries like red snapper, summer flounder, black sea bass, scup, amberjack and king mackerel,” Donofrio said. “RFA has worked very hard to ensure that meaningful dialog for fisheries reform was put forth before Congress, it is critical that the final markup coming out of this committee covers the finer points of Thursday’s discussion.”

Since early in 2007, RFA has been lobbying extensively for legislation to incorporate additional management flexibility into MSA, even spearheading a national rally in Washington DC on February 24, 2010 to set the stage for fisheries reform. Earlier this year, Rep. Frank Pallone (D-NJ) reintroduced his own Magnuson reform bill (HR3061) called the *Flexibility and Access in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act*. Key provisions in the Pallone legislation would allow for an extension of the timeframe for rebuilding a fish stock beyond 10 years under certain circumstances, increased transparency in the process for developing annual maximum fishing levels and requiring fisheries managers to use an improved system of data collection.

The bill also will allow the Secretary of Commerce to suspend restrictive fisheries management measures when there isn’t the science to back it up and requires the Secretary to mitigate adverse impacts fisheries management is having on coastal communities and businesses.

“Our coastal communities need help today because current conditions threaten a way of life for generations of fishermen on the Jersey shore and across the country,” said Pallone. “There are many ways we can help these communities by concentrating on the industries that are dependent on the ocean. These are necessary repairs to make the fisheries management process work again.”

Donofrio praised Rep. Pallone for being the first U.S. legislator to take the lead with attempting to reform MSA as early as the winter of 2007, and said he hopes to see Republicans and Democrats along the coast working together in the coming days to ensure that responsible reform is pushed through Congress.

“Partisan politics being what they are in Washington today, what’s most important here is that a final piece of legislation gets passed as quickly as possible that addresses the fundamental problems with Magnuson,” Donofrio said.

“It doesn’t matter which side of the aisle it comes from or who gets the credit, just as long as a sensible solution is achieved that keeps our fishermen on the water in the years to come,” he added.

To learn more about HR3061, visit www.joinrfa.org/press/HR3061bullets.pdf or visit www.thomas.gov and look up bill number HR3061.

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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.