



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

176 B South New York Road, Galloway, NJ 08205
P: 1-888-564-6732 F: 609-404-1968

For Immediate Release
Contact: Jim Hutchinson, Jr.

June 19, 2009
888 564-6732

RFA Testifies Before House Resources Subcommittee Tells Congress Recreational Fishing Activities Must Be Protected

On June 18, Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) Executive Director Jim Donofrio testified before the House Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife, chaired by Del. Madeleine Z. Bordallo (D-GU). The hearing was convened to review H.R. 21 a bill which would establish a new national policy for our oceans. The RFA was the only recreational fishing organization invited to testify before the Congressional Committee.

Introduced by Rep. Sam Farr (D-CA), H.R. 21 is meant to strengthen the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration while establishing a national and regional ocean governance structure, and for other purposes. According to the RFA, H.R. 21 would add undue bureaucracy to the fisheries management process, to the eventual exclusion of fishermen. Donofrio told House members that the RFA continues to have substantial objections to sections of the bill, and cautioned that any new ocean policies mandated by Congress should not overstep the basic tenets of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

"RFA maintains that Magnuson must remain the nation's primary fisheries law and that any national ocean policy spawned from H.R. 21 provide guidance and recommendations to Magnuson, not supersede it," Donofrio said during the afternoon session, following a nearly three-hour break in testimony due to a heavy calendar of congressional voting.

"Rigid rebuilding requirements under the current Magnuson may not be compatible with a more science based plan such as an ecosystem based approach," Donofrio told Representatives, adding "one must respect the limitations of our current science and not force ecosystem based management simply to advance a political purpose. We must proceed with caution as the consequences to the fishing community and resource could be profound."

Several environmental groups turned out to support the legislation introduced in January, including Senior Officer at Pew Environment Group, Christopher Mann. "The damage to our fish stocks was done over many years and cannot be quickly repaired," Mann said in his testimony, adding "based on the latest National Marine Fisheries Service report to Congress on the status of fish stocks, nearly a quarter of the stocks that have been assessed and have status determinations are overfished, subject to overfishing, or both." The Pew lobbyist went on to say, "I urge the committee to be vigilant in ensuring that from now on science, not politics, maintains the upper hand in fisheries management."

Despite the environmental groups' pressure on Congress for this new overriding oceans legislation, key members of Congress sitting on the committee spoke out against the legislation. "This bill's not going to go anywhere," said Rep. Don Young (R-AK). "You may try to work it through the House, you may have the Speaker help you out, but I'll stop it dead in the Senate, because you're not going to mess with my waters in Alaska, you're not going to mess with my fishermen as you've done in the past," Young added.

Young called H.R. 21 bad legislation,” and warned fellow Representatives that the bill was being pushed by “an overzealous group of people,” who the Alaska Congressman said is opposed to fishing. “I think possibly the people who wrote this bill have another alternative motive and that’s no involvement by Americans, Alaskans, in our waters,” Young said of some of the environmental groups supporting H.R. 21. “They’re against everything instead of trying to use science to make it work, and that’s the group that I do not respect because they’re not being up front or being honest.”

"Creating a new bureaucracy and potentially costing taxpayers more money is not the right approach," said Natural Resources Committee ranking member Doc Hastings (R-Wash.). "Finding the balance between conserving our ocean and its resources and supporting uses of our resources should be our focus." Subcommittee ranking member Henry Brown (R-SC) echoed Hastings' statement, asking whether such a policy is prudent at this time. "We would be better served to see how the administration moves forward with its process before we move legislation," Brown said.

Donofrio explained that the jurisdiction of the regional councils and Department of Commerce ultimately ends with fishermen, and if ecosystem based management is the goal for the US fishery management system, it would be necessary to first address non-fishing impacts on marine fish stocks. “Ecosystem based management is a data hungry approach and terrestrial and atmospheric stressors impact the marine resources,” Donofrio told the Committee, explaining that a variety of ecological processes influence fish populations outside of fishing, including climate and weather change. In written testimony, Donofrio said "RFA supports the concept of ecosystem based management...so long as, humans, including traditional activities such as recreational fishing, are not just considered but protected.”

To see transcripts of the testimony and view the subcommittee hearing in its entirety, visit the committee website at <http://resourcescommittee.house.gov>.

[Click here to read RFA's written testimony.](#)

[Click here for the complete hearing on video \(Jim Donofrio at 1:06:06 mark\).](#)

#####

*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 888-JOIN-RFA or visit www.joinrfa.org.*