



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

PO Box 3080, New Gretna, NJ 08224
P: 1-888-564-6732 F: 609-404-1968

For Immediate Release
Contact: Jim Hutchinson, Jr.

February 16, 2010,
888 564-6732

SCHUMER URGES COMMERCE SECRETARY TO SCRAP MRFSS CALLS FOR “MORATORIUM ON FLAWED SURVEY DATA”

U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer (D-NY) called on U.S. Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke, NOAA Administrator Jane Lubchenco, and NMFS Administrator Patricia Kurkul to issue an immediate moratorium on the flawed survey data used to implement recreational fishing quotas for the East Coast. In a letter addressed to Kurkul, Sen. Schumer cited the Marine Recreational Fishing Statistical Survey (MRFSS) as being “fatally flawed” and reminded NOAA of their responsibility through the federal Magnuson Stevens Act (MSA) to implement changes to the methodology used to gauge the level of recreational landings over the course of a season.

“We need better science and more data-based flexibility in our fishing management regulations,” said Schumer. “Keeping our fishing stocks healthy is absolutely critical, and to accomplish this we can’t base decisions on outdated science and poor methods. The current system not only falls short of achieving this goal, but it could take the Long Island fishing community down with it in 2010,” Schumer said adding that the fishing community “needs fairness and relief from flawed survey data now.”

MRFSS uses a combination of dockside interviews and evening telephone surveys to collect recreational harvest information. In 2005, Congress convened a special hearing to look the MRFSS methodology, which in turn led to an in-depth analysis by the National Research Council (NRC) concluding that “both the telephone and access components of the current approach have serious flaws in design or implementation and use inadequate analysis methods that need to be addressed immediately.” Pat Sullivan, the NRC committee chair and a Cornell professor, referred to MRFSS specifically as “fatally flawed.” The findings led to an MSA mandate that NMFS work on a new survey methodology which was supposed to be online and operational by the start of 2009. Federal delays however have pushed back the start date for MRIP until this year, which means MRFSS data is still regarded as “best available science” for estimating the annual recreational harvest.

Last week, Sen. Schumer asked Kurkul to issue an across-the-board moratorium on this flawed survey data in 2010 so that black sea bass and other species like fluke and porgies are not unfairly shutdown by bad science. “Acknowledging the problems with MRFSS, a new system mandated by the Magnuson-Stevens Act will be coming online in the coming years,” the senator wrote, adding “it would be patently unfair to punish anglers by reducing their quota due to erroneous landings estimates produced with a broken system. I request that NMFS dismiss future recreational overages predicted by MRFSS until the new system is fully implemented and calibrated by NOAA.”

Last fall, the Recreational Fishing Alliance posted a seven-page paper www.joinrfa.org/Press/RFA_MRFSS.pdf (*Fatally Flawed Science – Killing America’s Number One Outdoor Pastime*) pointing out many specific problems with MRFSS and outlining NRC’s view that experiential, narrative or local information from the fishing industry, currently considered purely “anecdotal” in nature by NMFS, should actually be considered in harvest methodology. “When no other information is available, anecdotal information may constitute the best information available,” the NRC reported in its executive summary, adding “In addition,

anecdotal information may be used to help validate other sources of information and identify topics for research.”

Schumer’s letter on behalf of anglers in the New York marine district can be greatly supported in many coastal states and is backed by a recent study conducted by the Connecticut Marine Fisheries Division (*Correction for Systematic Bias in Recreational Catch, Harvest and Trip Estimates from the MRFSS since the year 2000*) which noted a growing discrepancy between the estimated number of saltwater anglers according to MRFSS and the estimates of saltwater anglers from the US Fish and Wildlife Surveys (USFWS) and saltwater licenses sales from several Atlantic coast states. Authored by fisheries assessment expert Dr. Victor Crecco, the report shows that MRFSS’ 2008 saltwater angler estimates were often “three to four times higher than both the 2006 USFWS estimates and the 2008 adjusted saltwater license sales,” findings which Dr. Crecco said “strongly suggest that the MRFSS has severely overestimated the number of saltwater anglers and fishing trips particularly in recent years, and by extension, has severely inflated the true recreational catch and harvest of all finfish species.”

Schumer is urging the U.S. Department of Commerce and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to manage quotas based on sound data, and has instructed federal fisheries managers to dismiss any future overages estimated by MRFSS in order to restore some stability to coastal fishing communities. “MRFSS has proven to be extremely dangerous on a year to year basis – especially with regard to last year’s surprising black sea bass shutdown - and this raises concerns about fully utilizing the meager summer flounder liberalization New York is entitled to in 2010,” Sen. Schumer added.

“Fishing is a Long Island tradition that has been passed down for generations and without this relief, the NMFS could potentially stick New York with another year of draconian cuts,” Schumer said. “The fishing community has made many sacrifices and stocks are improving so restricting families and others from fishing for them, based on bad data, in 2010 is just plain wrong.”

This past Saturday, Sen. Schumer visited the Freeport Recreation Center on Long Island and met with several hundred recreational fishermen at the New York Sportfishing Federation’s annual fishing expo. “Fishing is one of our best industries in New York and you’ve been neglected for too long,” Schumer told the crowd of anglers and business owners, stressing the need to fix the Magnuson Stevens Act. Schumer is lead sponsor of Senate Bill 1255, the Flexibility in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act and urged show patrons to join him in a rally on the Capitol on February 24th while calling on “bureaucrats” to immediately fix the data collection system. “We’ve got to change the rules here,” Schumer said to a loud applause.

To view Sen. Schumer’s letter to NOAA, visit www.joinrfa.org/Press/SchumerLetter_020910.pdf

#####

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. Visit www.joinrfa.org.