



PRESS RELEASE

Recreational Fishing Alliance

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For Immediate Release
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June 4, 2012
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SEN. SCHUMER ANNOUNCES SENATE MAGNUSON HEARINGS Says Expected Capitol Hill Discussion With Fishermen “Long Overdue”

Following five years of diminished access, and a pair of national rallies in Washington DC, it appears that coastal fishermen will finally get a chance to be heard before the U.S. Senate.

United States Senator Charles E. Schumer (D-NY) today announced that he has secured a commitment to hold congressional oversight hearings this fall on the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the federal law which governs how our coastal fisheries are managed.

Standing aboard a docked party boat at the Freeport Boatmen’s Association on Long Island this morning, Sen. Schumer followed up on his personal pledge to fishermen that he made at the Keep Fishermen Fishing rally on March 21 to call on Congress to begin hearings on Magnuson reform this year.

“This hearing will finally give a national voice to the concerns that have been raised by Long Island anglers for years that faulty science and excessively strict quotas are decimating this industry,” said Schumer. “It’s long overdue for Long Island fishermen to be heard on Capitol Hill.”

Explaining how the federal fisheries law has resulted in excessively strict fishing regulations despite many healthy and growing fish stocks, Sen. Schumer told a group of fishermen assembled aboard the Capt. Pete out of Freeport that he had secured a commitment from Senate Fisheries Committee Chairman Mark Begich to conduct the hearing to begin the process of reauthorizing the federal fisheries law and allow for consideration of the fishing community’s input.

“The Long Island fishing industry is the lifeblood of communities throughout the Island so we must do everything possible to make sure federal fishing rules are allowing it to grow and thrive. Unfortunately, the industry is being stifled by regulations which are sorely in need of change,” continued Schumer.

“These hearings will help to publicly air the numerous problems with Magnuson-Stevens that Long Island fishermen face and lay out options for revamping the law and providing greater flexibility for those who make their living from the sea.”

As lead sponsor in the Senate of a bill called the Flexibility in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act (S632), Sen. Schumer said he is calling for a witness from New York’s marine district to provide first-hand testimony as to how the current law impacts New York and how it can be improved during reauthorization. The senator also made a particular point about the inaccuracy of the Marine Recreational Fishing Statistical Survey (MRFSS) that federal regulators use to determine recreational catch, a program which Congress had mandated to be replaced in 2009.

“Sen. Schumer has championed efforts in Washington on behalf of our coastal fishermen back in New York, speaking out about the continued use of fatally flawed recreational data collection and a broken federal fisheries law,” said Jim Hutchinson, Jr., managing director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA) and president of the New York Sportfishing Federation.

“The Senator gave impassioned speeches at a pair of national fishermen’s rallies in Washington pledging to get New York fishermen a seat at a Senate hearing, and he’s gone and fulfilled that promise once again, which really means something special to our coastal fishermen.”

Ever since the Magnuson-Stevens Act was reauthorized by unanimous consent in the Senate back in late 2006, RFA has been leading efforts to open up discussion and debate in Congress as to the inflexible nature of the federal fisheries law and its future impact on coastal fishermen. While popular Mid Atlantic fisheries like summer flounder (fluke), black sea bass and scup (porgy) have been deemed healthy, rebuilt fisheries in recent years, strict regulatory controls built into the federal law have made it increasingly difficult for anglers to access these economically vital fisheries.

“Five years ago when the black sea bass population was still in its rebuilding plan, our recreational fishing community would be out there on the black sea bass grounds this week taking advantage of the fishery,” said Hutchinson. “Today, we have a healthy, rebuilt black sea bass stock but boats like the Capt. Pete are tied up at the dock, unable to take advantage of this success because the federal law is forcing us to keep the fishery closed.”

“This is after regulators told our party and charter boat captains to hang tight, that their sacrifices over the past decade would eventually be rewarded,” Hutchinson said. “There won’t be any reward for the recreational fishing community until the Senate gives some serious consideration as to what the law has done here.”

RFA last week issued a bulletin with regard to the red snapper fishery in the Gulf of Mexico highlighting how NOAA Fisheries had announced the end of overfishing for that popular species. “However, as the population of red snapper grows and the fish get bigger, recreational fishermen catch their quota faster, resulting in a shorter season,” NOAA added in the release, explaining how the 2012 recreational red snapper season was being reduced by 8 days despite the good news on the stock.

“From snapper in the Gulf of Mexico to cod in the Gulf of Maine, our recreational fishermen are getting the short end of the stick when it comes to responsible management of both the fish and the fishermen, but the only way to address this issue is going to be through an act of Congress,” said RFA executive director Jim Donofrio.

“There are a lot of folks who complain about the state commissions and the regional councils, but the real culprit is a federal fisheries law which did not get a proper debate before Congress,” Donofrio said, adding “on behalf of coastal anglers in every state in the country, let’s hope this opportunity to go before a Senate Committee this fall will finally open up a reasonable dialog on coastal fisheries management in this country.”

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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.