



PRESS RELEASE

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LEADING U.S. SENATOR TO INTRODUCE CRITICAL FISHERIES LEGISLATION - SCHUMER SAYS "WE CAN REBUILD STOCKS & ALLOW FISHING INDUSTRY TO SURVIVE"

Washington - U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer (D-NY) announced today that he will introduce legislation in the Senate, authored in the House by Congressman Frank Pallone, Jr. (D-NJ), that will bring much-needed science-based modernization and flexibility to the outdated federal rules currently stifling America's once thriving fishing industry.

"We need better science and more flexibility in our fishing management regulations. We can rebuild fishing stocks and allow for a more nuanced approach to regulations that is not overly onerous on our fishing communities," said Schumer. "Keeping our fishing stocks healthy is absolutely critical, but -- because it is based on outdated science -- the current system not only falls short of achieving this goal, but it's taking Long Island fishing community down with it," Schumer said.

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) as presently written requires most fisheries designated by the Department of Commerce's National Marine Fisheries Service as "overfished" be completely rebuilt within 10 years, a timeline Schumer argues is arbitrary, often too broad, not based on available science, and lacking reasonable exceptions. The 10-year deadline has produced stringent quotas imprecisely limiting Long Island fishermen's catch, and the lack of management flexibility in the current regime prevents regulators from pursuing a more balanced approach based on the most up-to-date science.

Both the House and Senate bills have been crafted to allow fish stocks to rebuild while also taking consideration of the economic consequences to fishermen and fishing communities. In the case of summer flounder or fluke, the latest assessment data released shows that the stock is not overfished and that overfishing is not occurring. Regardless of the continued growth of the stock, which fisheries experts say is at its highest level ever in the past 40 years, rigid mandates written into MSA require that New York anglers continue to fish on tighter restrictions. "Our legislation provides some much needed balance and flexibility within the existing system to both preserve our fishing stocks and allow fisheries to thrive and grow," Schumer added.

"Senator Schumer clearly recognizes the flaws in the current legislation and understands that the fishing communities on Long Island are under unnecessary stress from the current law," said Jim Donofrio, Executive Director of the Recreational Fishing Alliance (RFA). "We applaud the Senator for standing up for anglers, identifying the problem, and addressing conservation needs and socioeconomic requirements in this one critical piece of fisheries legislation."

Schumer cited New York's decline in summer flounder quotas as an example of how onerous regulations hit home for anglers on Long Island. Comparing 2006 to 2009, New York suffered a 13% decline in recreational fluke quota, shrinking from 935,943 pounds in 2006 to 821,019 pounds in 2009. Along the Mid-Atlantic Coast, the numbers are similar, yet under requirements within MSA -- reauthorized by Congress in 2006 -- the regional fishery management councils have very limited exceptions to rebuild stocks to precise targets within 10 years.

Because the arbitrary deadline often requires stocks to be rebuilt to unprecedented levels and must be met without regard to the impact it will have on fishing communities and related industries, Sen. Schumer said the *Flexibility in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act of 2009* offers a way to ease pressure on fishermen and their communities as fisheries continue to rebuild.

"Fluke are now estimated to be 75% rebuilt and are on a strong trend toward total rebuilt status, yet because of the way the law is currently written, regulators continue to mindlessly reduce quotas every year in an effort to meet this arbitrary deadline, with no concern about how our industry is literally being strangled out of existence," said Capt. Dennis Kanyuk, President of United Boatmen of New York. "This approach has devastated our industry, with revenue losses exceeding 60% industry wide over the last five years and greater losses expected this year. We all hope that Congress acts swiftly to pass this bill, while there is still an industry left to save."

"The RFA is hoping these bills are a wake-up call for other members of Congress to jump into the fray and get Magnuson fixed once and for all, and base these management decisions on science," said Donofrio. "The arbitrary and unnecessary deadlines are based on emotional policy decisions, not science." Donofrio explained that the limited flexibility language written into the legislation will help put fisheries management decisions back on track with scientific commitments at the federal level.

"RFA agrees with the Obama administration and (NOAA) Secretary Lubchenco that fisheries must be managed under science," said Donofrio, while adding "all non-scientific rebuilding provisions must be removed from Magnuson, and environmental stewards like Rep. Pallone and Sen. Schumer truly understand that."

Schumer stressed that the legislation would increase flexibility of quotas and allow science to determine regulations. "It has become clear that the current law can sometimes impose unduly strict timelines for rebuilding depleted fisheries and this legislation provides a measure of flexibility in the rebuilding periods in order to keep fishing communities economically viable, without compromising the ultimate rebuilding goal," Schumer said.

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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. 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.