



Committee on Natural Resources U.S. House of Representatives

Chairman Doc Hastings

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CONTACT: [Press Office](#)
202-226-9019

Chairman Hastings: Increased Flexibility Needed to Ensure the Magnuson-Stevens Act is Benefiting Fish, Fishermen

WASHINGTON, D.C. – House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Doc Hastings (WA-04) delivered the following opening statement (as prepared) at today’s Full Committee markup of H.R. 4742, *“Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act.”*

“The Committee will now be considering HR 4742, the Strengthening Fishing Communities and Increasing Flexibility in Fisheries Management Act.

This bill will renew the Magnuson-Stevens Act that provides the fundamental framework for our Nation’s fisheries management. The last renewal, or reauthorization, of the Magnuson-Stevens Act was in 2006 and expired in September 2013.

The goal of HR 4742 is to strengthen and improve the Act through common sense reforms that increase management flexibility based on science, ensure greater government transparency, promote responsible fishing and prevent overfishing, improve fish data collection, and provide predictability and certainty for American jobs and local communities whose economic livelihoods depend on fishing.

The impact of fishing in many coastal regions – including in the State of Washington and in the Ranking Member’s state – help define that region. According to a recent report by NOAA, the U.S. seafood industry supported approximately 1.3 million jobs and generated \$141 billion in sales impacts, \$39 billion in income impacts, and \$59 billion in value added impacts.

Congress should be focused on policies that promote an America that works – and when over a million Americans’ jobs are tied to fishing, whether commercial or recreational fishing, renewing and improving the Magnuson-Stevens Act should be a priority. And it has been for this Committee. Over the past three years, the Committee has held ten hearings with 99 witnesses on the Act and related fisheries issues.

What we’ve repeatedly heard, is that the Act is fundamentally sound. But as with any federal statute, working well does not mean it’s perfect. This is a statute that requires a balance between the goal of maximizing the use of our Nation’s fishery resources and the need to prevent overfishing. It requires a balance between user groups. It also requires a

balance between achieving national goals and allowing regional flexibility. As such, it needs to be reviewed and revised on occasion.

One of the key messages the Committee has heard is that while the 2006/2007 amendments to the Act were good, those requirements have been hard to achieve in some regions without significant economic pain and that some level of flexibility is necessary.

This debate today isn't just about the use of a natural resource – it is about providing a sustainable source of protein as well as providing economic vitality to coastal communities. In some regions of the country, fishing communities are struggling. A report from NOAA stated that groundfish revenues “fell in 2012 in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island with Massachusetts and New Hampshire seeing a four year low in groundfish revenues.” In New Bedford alone, the value of groundfish landed dropped from \$31 million in 2011 to \$19 million in 2013. The report went on to state that the number of active vessels dropped from 916 vessels in 2009 to 764 vessels in 2012 and of the 764 active vessels only 401 took a groundfish trip in 2012. And in the Gulf of Mexico, the recreational harvest of red snapper in Federal waters is down to just 9 days despite encouraging reports on the health of the resource.

So while the Act is working, it does not work equally well across the country. This indicates that some regions may need a certain amount of flexibility to address their challenges.

This year, a number of knowledgeable groups have added to the reauthorization discussion – the National Academies of Sciences issued a report on rebuilding flexibility, the Managing Our Nation's Fisheries conference made 128 recommendations - many of which were related to statutory changes, the Secretary's Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee released a number of papers related to the reauthorization, and the eight regional fishery management councils have met as a group to make specific recommendations to Congress.

We took a look at all of these recommendations and last December released a Discussion Draft bill text to continue this conversation. Quite a number of comments have been received and a hearing was held to specifically review the Discussion Draft to gather more input. In addition, I have met with the Ranking Member several times and our staffs have worked for months to attempt to reach agreement on provisions and compromise.

As a result of all of these comments and the discussions with the Minority, I introduced H.R. 4742 last week. While I do not have enough time to go through all of the changes made to accommodate concerns of Members, I will note a few:

- Three provisions were dropped that the minority was concerned would allow overfishing to take place.
- The electronic monitoring provisions were totally rewritten to accommodate concerns raised by the Ranking Member.
- Several provisions were inserted at the request of the Ranking Member, including a requirement that the Secretary of Commerce report to Congress and the Councils on how much money is collected from catch share fisheries

and how that money is used.

- Data confidentiality language was modified to address some of the concerns raised by the Ranking Member and others.
- Language was clarified regarding the relationship between the Magnuson-Stevens Act and the Endangered Species Act to address concerns raised by minority Members of the Committee at the Discussion Draft hearing.
- Language was added to encourage and promote the use of cooperative research at the request of the Ranking Member.
- And the text of H.R 2646, the Revitalizing the Economy of Fisheries in the Pacific Act, was added, which I know is a priority for both Ranking Member Defazio and Rep. Herrera Beutler of Washington state.

Having said all of that, I know there are still areas of disagreement. But even with areas of disagreement, I believe we have addressed a lot of concerns raised by outside groups and the Ranking Member.

In addition, this markup is certainly not the last opportunity for us to make changes to accommodate Members' issues and concerns. I continue to be open to working with the Ranking Member, members of the Committee on both sides of the aisle, and with Members from New England and the Gulf who are struggling with real fishing challenges. “

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