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## **Witnesses Agree Federal Fishery Management is Flawed: Fishery Health, Small Businesses, Local Economies Hurt by Federal Overregulation, Lack of Accurate Data**

**PANAMA CITY, FL** – Today, the House Natural Resources Committee held a Full Committee [oversight field hearing](#) in Panama City, Florida entitled, “*Fishing = Jobs: How Strengthening America’s Fisheries Strengthens Our Economy.*” Florida’s fishing industry contributes billions of dollars in fishing-related expenditures each year and supports hundreds of thousands of jobs. The hearing today focused on the challenges and impediments the fishing industry faces due to federal overregulation and mismanagement of the fishery resources due to faulty or incomplete information. This reliance on bad data affects not just commercial and recreational fishing jobs, but also small businesses, and entire local economies.

*“Fishing plays a big part of the economy of the Gulf of Mexico and in particular, Florida. According to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report, in 2006, 2.8 million residents and non-residents - 16 years old and older - fished in Florida a total of 46.3 million days and contributed \$4.3 billion in fishing-related expenditures. And according to a Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission report, in 2008 the commercial seafood industry generated \$5.6 billion in sales in Florida. Those are impressive numbers and show that the health of the fishery resources off the coast of Florida can have a big impact on the overall economy of the State,” [said Natural Resources Chairman Doc Hastings \(WA-04\)](#). “While I know there are always tensions between the commercial and recreational fishing sectors and even more so when the harvesting opportunities are restricted, I hope we can look at ways to allow both sectors to grow by identifying the challenges and impediments that are affecting fisheries in this region.”*

*“I am pleased that today’s field hearing provided an opportunity for our fishermen to have their voices heard by their government. As an avid angler myself, I share serious concerns about a Magnuson-Stevens law that is broken. For the sake of our fishermen, as well as the operators of marinas, hotels, restaurants, and small businesses who rely on their continued success, Congress must commit to making the law more workable and responsive to the needs of our coastal communities. The federal government should have no role in picking winners and losers in hopes of locking up our fisheries with overregulation, free of congressional oversight and public opinion,” [said Rep. Steve Southerland \(FL-02\)](#).*

Florida’s fisheries support hundreds of thousands of jobs throughout the State and serve as

a chief supplier of seafood throughout the country. [Ken Wright, Chair of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission](#), testified to the jobs and economic benefits of Florida's robust fishing industry. *"Fishing is big business in Florida. There are approximately 150,000 Floridians directly employed in fishing-related businesses—100,000 in the commercial sector and 50,000 in the recreational sector. Florida alone accounts for nearly 40% of all marine recreational fishing nationally, with \$5.7 billion in total sales from recreational fishing in 2011 and \$5.6 billion in commercial sales in 2008. Gulf of Mexico fisheries are vital to Florida's economy. They are a main target for the recreational boating community, and are highly prized by resident and visiting anglers,"* stated Wright.

Due to federal overregulation and the implementation of arbitrary deadlines and mandates, anglers have seen fishing seasons shrink year after year. [Pamela Anderson, Vice President of the Panama City Boatman's Association](#), discussed the issues associated with the abbreviated fishing season. *"Each year we have been told we have overfished the annual catch limit, but each year we have done exactly as we were told, abiding by the regulatory bag limits and seasons. In addition, there was an update assessment completed in 2009 which showed the growth of the fishery to a point where we are no longer overfished nor undergoing overfishing... [t]he real problem was they [NOAA] did not factor that average weight properly when they determined the annual catch limit."* Anderson also stressed the jobs and economic benefits of maintaining bountiful, healthy fisheries that can only be achieved through the use accurate fishery data. *"Tourism, the fishing industry, and coastal communities have come to rely on fishing as an economic driver and so it is imperative that the regulations that impact the fishery are accurate. Fishery regulators depend on the science and interpretation of that science to implement proper regulations. The fishing industry expects the regulations to be fair, equitable, and made in consideration of the economic impacts they cause. We need your assistance in getting flexibility in the overfishing deadlines in the Magnuson, in stopping any new Catch Shares programs, and demanding that the data collection, stock assessments and modeling of the data, reflect true accurate, science that will give fishery managers the ability to relax some of the strict regulations and get our industry back to work."*

[Captain Robert Zales, II](#), appearing on behalf of the **National Association of Charterboat Operators (NACO)**, spoke of the issues fishing and boating communities face due to President Obama's National Ocean Policy and the large bureaucracy the Policy creates that includes, *"9 Regional Planning Bodies whose membership will be limited to Federal, State, and Tribal Representatives only."* According to Zales, *"As bureaucrats gather to draw lines on maps and determine the fate of significant contributors to the economy and social fabric of the nation, the fishing and boating communities simply will not have a seat at the table."*

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