



HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES
CHAIRMAN BRUCE WESTERMAN

To: House Committee on Natural Resources Republican Members
From: Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries staff: Annick Miller, (annick.miller@mail.house.gov), Doug Levine (doug.levine@mail.house.gov), Kirby Struhar (kirby.struhar@mail.house.gov), and Thomas Shipman (thomas.shipman@mail.house.gov) x58331
Date: Monday, June 2, 2025
Subject: Oversight Hearing titled “*Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness*”

The Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries will hold an oversight hearing on “*Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness*” on **Wednesday, June 4, 2025, at 10:15 a.m. in room 1324 Longworth House Office Building.**

Member offices are requested to notify Jackson Renfro (jackson.renfro@mail.house.gov) by 4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, June 3, 2025, if their Member intends to participate in the hearing.

I. KEY MESSAGES

- President Trump and Committee Republicans are committed to pursuing a policy agenda that secures public access to natural resources and restores America’s seafood competitiveness.
- Enjoyed by millions, recreational fishing is both a major pastime activity and an important economic driver for coastal communities. Similarly, commercial fishing is an engine for job creation and economic growth that makes a significant contribution to the nation’s food supply chain.
- The system developed under the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) has made America the world’s gold standard in fisheries management. Operating under this system and by engaging with stakeholders, regulators, and other experts, Congress can identify new opportunities to support fishing in the United States, safeguard fishing’s role in the national economy, and meet responsible stewardship obligations.
- The hearing will examine opportunities to partner with the Trump administration and sector stakeholders to develop the policies needed to steward and promote the productive harvest of our seafood resources.

II. WITNESSES

- **Mr. Rick Bellavance**, Chair, Council Coordination Committee, U.S. Regional Fishery Management Councils, North Kingstown, RI
- **Mr. Dustin Delano**, Chief Operating Officer, New England Fishermen's Stewardship Association, South Portland, ME
- **Ms. Martha Guyas**, Southeast Fisheries Policy Director, American Sportfishing Association, Tallahassee, FL
- **Mr. Larson Hunter**, Chairman, Board of Directors, Coastal Villages Region Fund, Scammon Bay, AK
- **Ms. Jamie O'Connor**, Deputy Executive Director, Alaska Marine Conservation Council, Anchorage, AK [*Minority witness*]

III. BACKGROUND

Fishing in the United States

Fishing, in both its recreational and commercial forms, is an essential feature of American life. Recreational fishing is enjoyed by millions nationwide and fosters a deep appreciation for the country's natural resources. A recent study found that 57.7 million Americans participated in recreational fishing in 2023.¹ This total, the largest participation ever recorded for a single year, includes 4.2 million new participants, 13 million youths, and 21.3 million females.² In addition to bringing joy to millions of Americans, recreational fishing also contributes significantly to the national economy. The Bureau of Economic Analysis, for example, found that outdoor recreation activities, including fishing, accounted for 2.3 percent of overall gross domestic product in 2023, or nearly \$640 billion.³

America's commercial fishing industry is no less vital. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the primary federal regulator of the United States' marine fisheries, found that the commercial fishing and seafood industry generated more than \$183 billion in economic value in sales and supported 1.6 million jobs in 2022.⁴ Total landings revenues for the commercial sector totaled \$5.9 billion that same year.⁵ Beyond these sizeable economic benefits, commercial fishing also supplies the country with a healthy food source.⁶

Despite the importance of these sectors, they have faced considerable difficulties over the last several years. Diverse stakeholders have alerted Committee Republicans to challenges ranging from serious concerns with the science and data that NOAA has used to inform management

¹ Outdoor Foundation & Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation. 2024 Special Report on Fishing. [https://asafishing.org/reports/2024-special-report-on-fishing/#iLightbox\[a9ec0b2d1f55a2bc382\]/0](https://asafishing.org/reports/2024-special-report-on-fishing/#iLightbox[a9ec0b2d1f55a2bc382]/0).

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Fisheries Economics of the United States 2022. November 2024. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.fisheries.noaa.gov/2024-11/FEUS-2022-SPO248B.pdf>.

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ See Bennett, Abigail, Pawan Patil, Kristin Kleisner, Doug Rader, John Virdin, and Xavier Basurto. 2018. Contribution of Fisheries to Food and Nutrition Security: Current Knowledge, Policy, and Research. NI Report 18-02. Durham, NC: Duke University. https://nicholasinstitute.duke.edu/sites/default/files/publications/contribution_of_fisheries_to_food_and_nutrition_security_0.pdf.

decisions, to measures that have unduly restricted fishing communities' access to marine resources, and overly burdensome regulatory structures that have developed under statutes like the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA).

Committee Republicans and President Trump are dedicated to solving these problems and reinvigorating the commercial and recreational fishing sectors in the United States. This commitment reflects actions taken in President Trump's first term. In 2020, the President issued Executive Order (EO) 13921, titled "Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth,"⁷ which outlined a federal policy to "identify and remove unnecessary regulatory barriers restricting American fishermen and aquaculture producers."⁸ The EO also included provisions to combat illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, sought to remove barriers to aquaculture permitting, and established an Interagency Seafood Trade Task Force.⁹

President Trump built upon these efforts promptly after returning to office. On April 17, 2025, as part of his first 100 days agenda, the President signed an EO titled "Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness."¹⁰ The EO stated that, despite the opportunities that the United States has to lead the world in fishing and seafood production, "seafood is one of the most heavily regulated sectors in the United States."¹¹ The EO cited some of the many challenges faced by American fishermen, including "restrictive catch limits,...inaccurate and outdated fisheries data, and delayed adoption of modern technology."¹² To ameliorate these problems, the EO directed the federal government to address unfair trade practices, promote integrity in the seafood supply chain, reduce regulatory burdens, and level the playing field for American companies.¹³

The EO also directed the Secretary of Commerce (Secretary) to consult with the fishing industry and the Secretary of Health and Human Services to "immediately consider suspending, revising, or rescinding regulations that overly burden America's commercial fishing, aquaculture, and fish processing industries."¹⁴ It further required the Secretary to identify the most overregulated fisheries within 30 days and work with each of the Regional Fishery Management Councils (Councils) to reduce that regulatory burden. Additionally, in line with the President's EO from 2020, each of the Councils is directed to provide a list of recommendations "to reduce burdens on domestic fishing and to increase production" within 180 days,¹⁵ with goals of increasing profitability, preventing closures, and stabilizing access.¹⁶ The Councils will each develop a work plan to implement these actions. Alongside those efforts, the Secretary is directed to work with the public, experts, and stakeholders to improve management and science in accordance with requirements under the MMPA, ESA, and the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and

⁷ White House. Executive Order 13921. "Promoting American Seafood Competitiveness and Economic Growth." May 12, 2020. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2020/05/12/2020-10315/promoting-american-seafood-competitiveness-and-economic-growth>.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ White House. Executive Order "Restoring American Seafood Competitiveness." April 17, 2025.

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/restoring-american-seafood-competitiveness/>.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.*

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.*

¹⁶ *Id.*

Management Act (MSA).¹⁷ Finally, the EO also directs the Secretary, through the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) to “incorporate less expensive and more reliable technologies and cooperative research programs into fishery assessments,”¹⁸ and to “take all appropriate action to modernize data collection and analytical practices” to improve fisheries management.¹⁹

These recent executive actions present many exciting opportunities. Given the desire from stakeholders and Committee Members to enhance commercial and recreational fishing in the United States, examining this recent EO and other means of accomplishing these objectives is a timely discussion.

Federal Fisheries Management System

The United States is the gold standard for fisheries management. Signed into law in 1976,²⁰ the MSA is the principal statute that governs marine fisheries management in the United States’ federal waters up to 200 miles offshore, within the nation’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ).²¹

The MSA established a federal fishery management system based on cooperative federalism, empowering eight Councils to craft fishery management plans (FMPs) to manage their resources. The eight Councils are: New England, Mid-Atlantic, South Atlantic, Caribbean, Gulf of America, Pacific, Western Pacific, and North Pacific.²² Councils are made up of stakeholders from the commercial and recreational fishing sectors, scientists, seafood processors, and other experts.²³ This bottom-up approach allows for diverse viewpoints to be heard and considered as Councils develop FMPs, providing the regional flexibility needed to sustainably manage our nation’s federal fisheries.

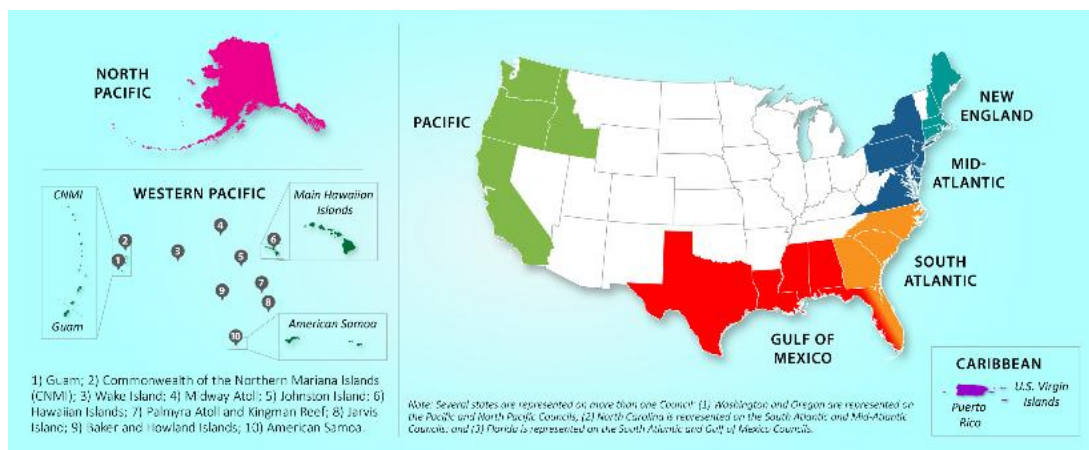


Figure 1 Map of the 8 Fishery Management Councils | Source: Fishery Management Councils

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ NOAA Fisheries. Laws & Policies: Magnuson-Stevens Act. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/topic/laws-policies/magnuson-stevens-act>.

²¹ *Id.*

²² U.S. Regional Fishery Management Councils. About the Councils. <https://www.fisherycouncils.org/about-the-councils>.

²³ *Id.*

The Councils develop FMPs based on 10 guidelines included in the MSA known as the National Standards.²⁴ These standards are:²⁵

- National Standard 1: Optimum Yield
- National Standard 2: Scientific Information
- National Standard 3: Management Units
- National Standard 4: Allocations
- National Standard 5: Efficiency
- National Standard 6: Variations and Contingencies
- National Standard 7: Costs and Benefits
- National Standard 8: Communities
- National Standard 9: Minimize bycatch and bycatch mortality
- National Standard 10: Safety of Life at Sea

Over time, changes have been made to these standards consistent with direction from Congress. For example, in 2016, NOAA released a final rule to revise guidelines for National Standards 1, 3, and 7,²⁶ to meet requirements that Congress included in the 2007 reauthorization of the MSA.²⁷ The Biden administration, by contrast, attempted to update National Standards 4, 8, and 9 in 2023,²⁸ even though Congress had not made changes to MSA directing NOAA to do so. Reclaiming Congress' role in updating these standards and their application in the development of FMPs is therefore critical, particularly in the wake of the Supreme Court's recent decision overturning *Chevron* deference.

The MSA also established the Council Coordination Committee (CCC), which consists of the executive director, chair, and vice chair of each of the 8 Councils.²⁹ The CCC was created to “discuss issues of relevance to all Councils, including issues related to the implementation of this Act.”³⁰ Accordingly, the CCC provides the Councils with a forum to share information and expertise at the regional level and engage with headquarters staff from NOAA and NMFS.

The CCC normally meets twice a year; once in the spring or summer, hosted by each of the councils on a rotating basis, and once in the fall, hosted by NMFS in the Washington, D.C., area.³¹ Most recently, the CCC gathered in May 2025 in New Bedford, Massachusetts,³² where each of the Councils provided their own updates and heard presentations from various NOAA

²⁴ Section 301, Magnuson-Stevens Act. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/dam-migration/msa-amended-2007.pdf>.

²⁵ NOAA Fisheries. National Standard Guidelines. Last Updated February 7, 2025. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/laws-policies/national-standard-guidelines>

²⁶ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Magnuson-Stevens Act Provisions; National Standard Guidelines. October 18, 2016. Final Rule. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2016-10-18/pdf/2016-24500.pdf>.

²⁷ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. National Marine Fisheries Service. National Standard 1 Guidelines Summary of 2016 Revisions. Updated Presentation as of October 19, 2016. <https://media.fisheries.noaa.gov/dam-migration/ns1-councils-webinar-presentation.pdf>.

²⁸ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Fisheries of the United States; Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act; National Standard 4, 8, and 9 Guidelines. May 15, 2023. Proposed Rule. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2023-05-15/pdf/2023-10294.pdf>.

²⁹ Section 302 (l). Magnuson-Stevens Act. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/dam-migration/msa-amended-2007.pdf>.

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ U.S. Regional Fishery Management Councils. Council Coordination Committee. <https://www.fisherycouncils.org/ccc>.

³² U.S. Regional Fishery Management Councils. Council Coordination Committee. May 2025 CCC Meeting. <https://www.fisherycouncils.org/ccc-meetings/may-2025>.

and NMFS officials on recent presidential EOs, fisheries science and research priorities, and budgetary matters.³³

In line with the broader goals outlined in President Trump’s EO, this hearing provides an opportunity to consider the discussions that took place at the most recent CCC meeting. Considering those discussions can help Congress determine how best to partner with the administration to support the council system. An effective partnership can encourage the continued sustainable management of our natural resources while allowing our recreational and commercial fishing sectors to thrive.

Management and Permitting Challenges

Although the management process under the MSA has often garnered broad approval from those involved in U.S. fishing, the fishing industry has faced challenges in recent years. In recent years, members from both the commercial and recreational fishing sectors have raised substantial concerns about the management and operation of American fisheries. Stakeholders in both communities, for instance, have repeatedly expressed their lack of confidence in the science that informs management decisions and in the dearth of timely stock assessments. Additionally, regulations developed under the ESA and MMPA have often placed burdens on recreational and commercial fishing, creating unnecessary hardship. Efforts under the National Marine Sanctuary Act (NMSA), or through the establishment of marine national monuments, have also restricted access to fisheries resources. This can place the United States at a competitive disadvantage compared to international competitors, including our adversaries.

Stakeholders have also voiced concern over issues plaguing NOAA’s data collection and survey efforts. The timely collection of data is critical for NOAA to inform stock assessments and the development of FMPs. Stock assessments based on inaccurate or outdated data—which have proliferated in recent years—can lead to shorter fishing seasons or more restrictive catch limits and quotas. Additionally, if NOAA or other partners are delayed in collecting the data needed to make key management decisions, openings or early closures of fisheries could also be delayed, which could produce other negative consequences. Industry and recreation advocates have called for deploying technologies that could improve these data collection efforts, with the potential to both reduce costs and boost efficiency.³⁴ In the recreational fishing community, there have also been concerns with the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP),³⁵ NOAA’s data program that seeks to estimate total recreational catch to inform management for recreational fisheries.³⁶ Recent discussions have also examined how NOAA can better partner with anglers and state agencies to gather the data needed to manage recreational fisheries.

These issues were discussed at great length at the most recent CCC meeting. In his presentation, Dr. Evan Howell, NOAA’s Acting Chief Science Advisor and Director of Scientific Programs,

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ FlyWire. Letter to NOAA Acting Administrator Laura Grimm RE: Electronic Monitoring of Fisheries. April 8, 2025. https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/noaa_administrator_grimm_letter_4.8.25.pdf.

³⁵ House Natural Resources Committee Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries. “Modernizing NOAA and Using Best Available Science.” June 27, 2024. <https://naturalresources.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=416219>.

³⁶ NOAA Fisheries. About the Marine Recreational Information Program. Last Updated April 21, 2025. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/recreational-fishing-data/about-marine-recreational-information-program>

talked about the importance of NOAA engaging with each of the Councils on their scientific priorities.³⁷ This issue is important, given the requirements under the MSA for each of the Councils to submit their multi-year research priorities to NOAA³⁸ and for the Secretary to publish a strategic plan for fisheries research for a five-year period.³⁹ Dr. Howell also talked about the importance of cooperative research and engaging with industry participants in formulating stock assessments and gathering other social and economic data.⁴⁰ Given the numerous ways in which the President's EO focused on engaging stakeholders and modernizing technology to improve data collection, the Committee has an opportunity to seize on these CCC meeting topics and partner with the Trump administration to fix some of the longstanding issues that have afflicted fisheries management.

The Committee has also been heavily engaged on regulatory issues related to the MMPA and ESA. In February, the Committee held an oversight hearing in which stakeholders testified that both statutes contain requirements and ambiguities that can negatively impact the fisheries sector. Under the MMPA, the requirement for NOAA to make a negligible impact determination for commercial fishing operations⁴¹ is challenging to implement, particularly because the statute does not define "negligible impact." It was also noted during the February hearing that the formula NOAA uses to develop negligible impact determinations is widely viewed as overly precautionary.⁴² MMPA issues haven't just impacted the commercial sector, however. States have also faced recent challenges and delays under MMPA in obtaining permits and authorizations for various fisheries research programs. For example, the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department has spent several years working with NOAA to obtain permits for its research activities. After years of discussion, the proposed rule and request for comments for the permit were finally published in the Federal Register in May 2025.⁴³

The ESA also raises significant obstacles, including the designation of critical habitat by NMFS or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). Under the current framework, Section 4 of the ESA charges FWS and NMFS with reviewing and acting on petitions to list species as threatened or endangered and designate their critical habitat.⁴⁴ Designation of critical habitat can lead to the enactment of measures that similarly restrict access, which can also challenge fisheries management. Two examples from the Biden administration were NOAA's proposed rule to

³⁷ NOAA Fisheries. Science Update, Dr. Evan Howell. CCC. May 14, 2025.

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56c65ea3f2b77e3a78d3441e/t/6823b0fd6907cc6ec41620af/1747169537341/Final+-+May+2025_CCC_NOAA_ScienceUpdate_NewBedford_MA.pdf.

³⁸ Section 302(h)(7). Magnuson-Stevens Act. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/dam-migration/msa-amended-2007.pdf>.

³⁹ Section 404(b). Magnuson-Stevens Act. <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/s3/dam-migration/msa-amended-2007.pdf>.

⁴⁰ NOAA Fisheries. Science Update, Dr. Evan Howell. CCC. May 14, 2025.

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/56c65ea3f2b77e3a78d3441e/t/6823b0fd6907cc6ec41620af/1747169537341/Final+-+May+2025_CCC_NOAA_ScienceUpdate_NewBedford_MA.pdf.

⁴¹ Testimony of Paul Weiland. Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries. February 26, 2025. <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/II/II13/20250226/117865/HHRG-119-II13-Wstate-WeilandP-20250226.pdf>.

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Notice; receipt of application for Letter of Authorization; request for comments and information. May 19, 2025. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2025-05-19/pdf/2025-08869.pdf>.

⁴⁴ *The Endangered Species Act: How Litigation is Costing Jobs and Impeding True Recovery Efforts: Oversight Hearing Before the H. Comm. On Natural Resources*, 112th Cong. (2011) (testimony of Karen Budd-Falen, Budd-Falen Law Offices, LLC., at 10).

designate critical habitat for Rice's whales,⁴⁵ along with another proposal to dramatically expand an existing vessel speed restriction along the Atlantic coast to protect the North Atlantic right whale.⁴⁶ Both proposals would have had devastating consequences for industries that operate offshore, including fishing. During the 118th Congress, these proposals were the subject of extensive Committee oversight and faced criticism from many Committee Members.

While both proposed rules were never finalized, underlying challenges with the ESA still exist. To address this issue, Chairman Bruce Westerman (R-AR-04) has introduced the "*ESA Amendments Act of 2025*," which would make critical reforms to the permitting process and address statutory ambiguities. More information on that legislation can be found [here](#).

In addition to critical habitat, sanctuary designations under the NMSA and the enactment of marine monuments can also be detrimental for commercial and recreational fishing. In the Pacific Ocean, the designation of the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument had historically closed off access to commercial fishing for the United States' fleet. This measure put the United States at a competitive disadvantage and threatened geopolitical security given China's presence in the region. On April 17, 2025, however, President Trump corrected this historic mistake by issuing a proclamation "*Unleashing American Commercial Fishing in the Pacific*," which expanded commercial fishing from 50 to 200 miles within the EEZ.⁴⁷ This change was met with a great deal of enthusiasm from leaders in the region.⁴⁸

Moving Forward

The challenges that the recreational and commercial fishing sectors have faced in recent years, along with the Trump administration's keen focus on them, present the Committee and the Congress with a tremendous opportunity. The 119th Congress should work with federal agencies, states, experts, and other interested stakeholders to ensure that the goals of President Trump's recent executive actions are met. This will require engagement with NOAA, the Councils, and other federal agencies to ensure that all voices are represented at the discussion table. This work has the potential to be transformative across the United States by encouraging greater recreational opportunities for families and individuals, strengthening the commercial industries that contribute to the American economy and food supply, and solidifying the United States's position as the gold standard for advancing each of these pursuits far into the future.

⁴⁵ National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Endangered and Threatened Species; Designation of Critical Habitat for the Rice's Whale. Proposed Rule. July 24, 2023. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/07/24/2023-15187/endangered-and-threatened-species-designation-of-critical-habitat-for-the-rices-whale>.

⁴⁶ 50 C.F.R. §224.105; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), "Amendments to the North Atlantic Right Whale Vessel Strike Reduction Rule," 87 Federal Register 46921-46936, August 1, 2022. Hereinafter NOAA, NMFS, "Amendments to the North Atlantic Right Whale Vessel Strike Reduction Rule."

⁴⁷ White House. Proclamation. Unleashing American Commercial Fishing in the Pacific. April 17, 2025. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/04/unleashing-american-commercial-fishing-in-the-pacific/>.

⁴⁸ Congresswoman Aumua Amata Coleman Radewagen. Amata Hails President Trump's Proclamation Restoring Fishing. April 17, 2025. <https://radewagen.house.gov/media-center/press-releases/amata-hails-president-trump-s-proclamation-restoring-fishing-0>.