

Statement of Rep. Frank Pallone, Jr.

Natural Resources Full Committee Hearing

**H.R. 594 - the Coastal Jobs Creation Act
H.R. 3061, the Flexibility and Access in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act**

December 1, 2011

I want to thank Chairman Hastings and Ranking Member Markey for holding today's hearing. As the committee is aware recreational and commercial fishing represent the economic and cultural foundations of communities all across the United States. While the markets on Wall Street have gone up and down and manufacturing has drastically changed, recreational and commercial fishing have remained a truly American industry that we can depend on.

Whether it is the local charter boat captain, the commercial fishing cooperative, the dedicated angler or the local business owner, they know the importance that fishing has for our economy. That is why it is important to have today's discussion and hear from real stakeholders about how they are affected by overly burdensome fisheries management.

I am glad to have the opportunity for the committee to discuss my bills: H.R. 594, the Coastal Jobs Creation Act and H.R. 3061, the Flexibility and Access in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act. Both of these bills will help fishermen get back on the water and spur job creation and economic activity in our communities.

When the Magnuson Stevens Reauthorization Act of 2006 became law fishermen were told that rebuilding stocks on a 10-year timeline, although painful in the short-term, would provide them with higher quotas and more fish to catch. At the time, I made the argument that we could rebuild fisheries without adhering to a completely arbitrary

deadline that would hurt a fisherman's ability to put bread on the table. In the 110th Congress and 111th Congress, I introduced the Flexibility in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act which would have given the Secretary of Commerce the authority to extend these rebuilding timelines beyond 10 years when the science and biology of a fish stock told us we can rebuild fisheries without bankrupting businesses like tackle shops, party boats, and commercial fishermen.

Yet, new problems with fisheries management have become unfortunately clear. As a result, I have reintroduced my legislation to create flexibility in the rebuilding timelines and added a number of critical additions to address these new problems.

Transparency in the scientific process

Fishermen were promised access to rebuilt and healthy stocks and are instead seeing reduced catch levels and in season closures of economically vital fisheries. My bill, the Flexibility and Access in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act of 2011, increases transparency in the management process by requiring a published report, for all the public to see and analyze, that explains exactly what information is being used and if the unavailability of information is being used to lower fishing quotas. My bill will further allow the Secretary of Commerce to step in and override overly burdensome restrictions in a fishery that has been rebuilt, not subject to overfishing or approaching overfishing and when the science simply cannot support such restrictions in light of the social and economic impacts.

Better information for managing recreational fishing

New restrictions established in the 2006 Reauthorization of the Magnuson Act that were intended to be put in place with improved science and data programs are being

implemented while the new data collection programs designed to get the better science and data are still just getting off the ground.

My bill requires fisheries managers to get going on using the improved data collection method. It also requires the National Research Council to issue a report on improvements that need to be made with recreational fishing data collection and surveying so we can understand what is actually happening with fishing in any given year and ensure that we aren't needlessly closing healthy fisheries.

Economic and Social Impacts

Requirements in current law to consider the social and economic impacts on coastal communities are given nothing more than lip service while individuals and families feel the real impacts of burdensome restrictions that are just not necessary for maintaining healthy fisheries.

My bill requires that a social and economic impact statement be prepared on an annual basis and in conjunction with a fishing industry advisory committee so we are sure that the councils are using real world experience and advice. The Secretary would then be required to take action to mitigate any adverse impacts identified and then submit to Congress a report describing the efforts taken and provide recommendations on how to improve Federal fisheries programs to promote sustainable fisheries and economic vitality in fishing communities.

Coastal Jobs Creation Act

I am also glad to have the opportunity to discuss my bill, the Coastal Jobs Creation Act. It creates a coastal jobs grant program that will ensure funds go to the programs and projects that help fishermen, the fishing industry and coastal community businesses. The

bill will also make certain that the federal government works with fishermen to ensure they are a part of the process and receive the support they deserve during these hard economic times. The bill invests in revitalizing our working waterfronts, improving the science we use to manage fisheries, removing and cleaning up marine debris, funding restoration projects that protect marine resources and developing new technologies. We can do all this while using the work of fishermen, whether by deploying them as observers for monitoring, assisting in cooperative research or providing their idle fishing vessels for rebuilding working waterfronts or coral reefs.

Conclusion

I would just like to point out again that recreational and commercial fishing is something the United States can depend on. The fishermen I know are some of the most dedicated conservationists you find out there. Their livelihoods depend on it. In 2009, the commercial fishing industry supported approximately 1,029,542 jobs and \$116 billion in sales. In the same year, recreational fishing activities supported over 327,000 jobs and recreational fishing trips and equipment sales totaled \$50 billion. These numbers should not be taken lightly and I ask that after the committee considers the testimony from today that H.R. 594 and H.R. 3061 be scheduled for a vote so we can support these jobs.