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STATEMENT OF THE HONORABLE HENRY E. BROWN, JR.
RANKING REPUBLICAN, AT THE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON INSULAR AFFAIRS, OCEANS AND WILDLIFE
OVERSIGHT HEARING ON CATCH SHARES
MARCH 16, 2010.

Good morning, Madam Chairwoman.

Madam Chairwoman, just a few weeks ago, thousands of fishermen - recreational, charter, and commercial fishermen - came to Washington, DC to air their concerns about the direction fisheries management has taken in this country. Rarely do we see all of the fisheries sectors speaking with one voice, but in this case, we did.

The fishermen came to DC to make sure we heard their concerns that Federal agencies are making decisions without good science and that agencies ignore the fishermen when making fishery management decisions. I share that concern. If the agency cannot collect adequate information on how many fish are out there, how can they set harvest levels? If they do not collect adequate information on the harvest levels of recreational and commercial fishermen, how will they know how many fish are being taken? This is not rocket science, but it does take money.

It seems that while the agency is willing to increase funding by \$810 million for one satellite program to gather climate information, it apparently can only find about \$1 million in increases for the stock assessments for the 530 fishery stocks that NOAA manages. This does not reflect the actual needs of the agency for fisheries management.

Where do catch shares fit into all of this? We've got some catch share programs across the country that will require funding and we should fund those, but I cannot see why we need to spend \$54 million in one year on a new initiative to spread these catch share programs further - especially when fishermen do not appear to be asking for them.

Madam Chairwoman, I know at the budget hearing we requested a break down of how the \$17 million for catch shares in FY2010 is being spent and how the agency intends to spend the \$54 million in FY2011. I don't believe we have received that information yet, but I would also like to ask the agency to provide us with how their FY2011 budget proposal will enable us to keep the red snapper fishery open next year. Maybe we should use the \$54 million that is proposed for catch shares and use it to either get the information necessary to reopen the fishery or compensate those who have lost their jobs as a result of the closures.

Fishermen are frustrated and hearing that the budget will not make their fishing opportunities any better next year is not what they want to hear. Nor do they want to hear that catch shares are the answer to all of their problems. I would like to suggest that NOAA concentrate on figuring out how many fish are out there and how to keep fishermen working rather than spending \$54 million to tell fishermen how great catch shares are.

Thank you, Madam Chairwoman.