

STATEMENT OF
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BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE, AND OCEANS

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Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss H.R. 4686, the Multi-State and International Fisheries Conservation and Management Act of 2006. The Act would reauthorize a number of laws governing the domestic and international conservation and management of living marine resources important to the United States. I am William Gibbons-Fly, Director of the Office of Marine Conservation, Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs at the Department of State. I am here to speak to the laws covered by H.R. 4686 that address international fisheries and U.S. participation in multilateral regional fisheries management organizations: the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act of 1975, which implements the International Convention for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, and the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Convention Act of 1995, which implements the Convention on Future Multilateral Cooperation in the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries. The Department of State supports reauthorization of both of these Acts so that the United States can remain an active participant in international efforts to conserve and manage the living marine resources in the Atlantic Ocean.

The United States has been a member of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas, or ICCAT, since its creation in 1967. Throughout this time, the United States has worked actively within the organization to protect and advance U.S. interests, to ensure equitable access for U.S. fishers to the high-value stocks the commission manages, and to encourage long-term conservation of such stocks. With significant leadership from the United States, ICCAT has been on the forefront of efforts to rein in illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing and to use trade tools, including multilateral import sanctions, against those who overfish ICCAT species. At the same time, ICCAT faces a number of challenges in the years ahead. These include challenges in conducting robust stock assessments, rebuilding diminished tuna stocks, ensuring compliance with agreed quotas, and accommodating the allocations interests of new members, in particular those from the developing world.

The United States has just assumed chairmanship of both the Commission and its scientific committee and, as a result, is in a unique position to steer ICCAT in the right direction to face these challenges. Continued U.S. involvement in the organization will be critical to ensuring its future success. The reauthorization of the Atlantic Tunas Convention Act will allow the United States to remain actively engaged in this process.

The Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization, or NAFO, was created in 1979, but the United States only became a party in 1995. In the intervening period, growing concerns over the state of many of the world's fishery resources led to the development of a new international fisheries legal framework, including the UN Fish Stocks Agreement, and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Compliance Agreement and Code of Conduct. The United States was a leader throughout this process and, since joining NAFO, has likewise led efforts to incorporate elements of this new framework within NAFO, including through precedent-setting measures to halt non-member fishing, increase organizational transparency, and incorporate the precautionary approach to fisheries management. Despite these efforts, however, most of the stocks managed by NAFO remain in very poor condition and some key stocks have been under fishing moratoria for several years. Much remains to be done to rebuild these stocks, in particular through strengthened tools to address bycatch and strengthen compliance by members and non-members.

Last year, the Committee on Fisheries of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization reiterated that existing regional fisheries organizations must strengthen their mandates to conserve and rebuild diminished fishery resources under their purview. NAFO is one of the first regional fisheries management organizations to begin such a reform process. The United States now receives minimal direct economic return from the fisheries under NAFO's jurisdiction. As a result, and in cooperation with our colleagues from NOAA, we have been assessing very carefully the benefits of continued U.S. participation in this organization. For now, we believe our active participation in this pending reform process presents the United States with its best chance to bring the benefits we receive in line with the leadership and resources we contribute.

The next few years will be critical to building a NAFO conservation and management regime that allows the fish stocks in the Northwest Atlantic to recover, and a decision-making process that allows the United States a fair and reasonable

opportunity to take part in NAFO-regulated fisheries. Therefore, we also support reauthorization of the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Convention Act of 1995.

Mr. Chairman, reauthorization of both of these Acts will allow the United States to continue its role as an important voice for strong and effective conservation and management of key Atlantic fish stocks. Participation in regional organizations such as NAFO and ICCAT forms an important part of our international fisheries policy by ensuring our participation in the decisions governing these important shared resources and providing an opportunity to protect and advance significant U. S. interests as new international law is written. The challenges are many and the results do not always come as quickly as we would like to see them, but our continued involvement is vital.

Thank you very much; I would be happy to take any questions that you may have.