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STATEMENT BY THE HONORABLE DOC HASTINGS
RANKING REPUBLICAN MEMBER, COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
AT THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INSULAR AFFAIRS, OCEANS AND WILDLIFE
OVERSIGHT HEARING ON CATCH SHARES
March 16, 2010

Madam Chair, I appreciate you holding this hearing on the issue of catch shares. Catch share fishery management plans have proven to be an effective management tools in some regions and in some fisheries, but they are not appropriate, in my mind, for every fishery.

Catch share programs, if desired, should be developed from the bottom up through the regional fishery management council system and not forced or mandated by the agency. The agency should not be pushing catch shares where they are not wanted. A recent presentation by NOAA claims that there are 37 catch share programs that will be either implemented, or in the development stage, within the next 2 ½ years. While there have been approximately a dozen catch share plans implemented in the last 20 years, expecting three times that number to be implemented or developed in the next 2 ½ years is unreasonable - especially when the regional fishery management councils are not aware which fisheries the agency intends on turning into catch share plans.

There are some who feel that NOAA is pushing catch shares because the agency believes they will solve all of the management problems that face the agency. Implementing catch shares does not replace the need for basic stock assessments, data collection, and enforcement. These are fundamental requirements for effective management of the fishery - whether under a catch share program or some other fishery management plan. The agency needs to focus its energy on collecting the basic data it needs to effectively manage the fisheries rather than imposing a new initiative.

There is also growing concern about where the funding for 37 new catch share programs will come from. At the Subcommittee's hearing on the President's FY 2011 budget request, concern was raised that the new National Catch Shares Program initiative request for \$54 million is taking funding away from other agency needs such as stock assessments, cooperative research, and data collection on recreational fishing activities. The agency needs to make sure it funds basic fishery management activities and does not take money away from other fishery management priorities.

NOAA must seek long term solutions to resolve fishery allocation conflicts. Catch share programs have been and can be effective, but only when the fishermen are active participants in the development and the design of the program. Catch shares will not replace the need for other management activities and funding for new catch share programs should not come at the expense of existing priorities within the agency.

Finally, Madam Chair, I would like to follow up on a request for a legislative hearing on H.R. 3910 made by the bill's sponsor, Congressman Rick Larsen. The bill would allow members of the longline catcher processor sector in the Bering Sea to approve a coop management plan if 80 percent of the members agree. I am an original cosponsor of the bill and would encourage the Subcommittee to hold a hearing on the legislation.

Thank you for your consideration, and, again, thank you for holding today's hearing.