

Testimony: Jackie Odell
Before the House Committee on Resources
April 25, 2006

Good morning Chairman Pombo and Representatives Frank and Young. Thank you for inviting me to testify at today's hearing on this important legislation you have introduced to reauthorize the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

My name is Jackie Odell. I am the Executive Director of the Northeast Seafood Coalition (NSC), the largest fishing industry organization in New England that represents commercial groundfish fishermen from all of the predominate gear sectors and vessel sizes, as well as many shore-side businesses. Our members are family-owned and operated small businesses that rely upon the health and longevity of groundfish stocks. These fishermen and their many generations of forefathers have been central to the social and economic fabric of New England communities for over four centuries.

The Northeast Seafood Coalition strongly supports this legislation. In particular, we greatly appreciate the inclusion of a critical component of fisheries management; rebuilding flexibility.

As we have experienced in New England, the northeast multispecies fishery, otherwise known as the groundfish fishery, is among the most complex and dynamic in our nation. This is due to the extraordinary nature of the Gulf of Maine and Georges Bank ecosystems, the unknown and often unpredictable interactions between stocks within the groundfish complex as well as with other fish stocks, and the lack of in-depth scientific understanding. Such complexity has led to scientific stock assessments and projections that have been wildly volatile and, at times, grossly unreliable for any number of the 19 stocks that comprise this fishery. We realize such scientific uncertainty may not exist in other fisheries throughout the United States but this has been an extremely difficult reality of the groundfish fishery in the northeast. Our fishery managers must be provided with the maximum degree of flexibility to deal with such complexity and scientific uncertainty in developing rebuilding plans that are both practical and effective for these stocks. We think your bill will both improve our science and preserve this needed flexibility.

Amendment 13 to the Northeast Multispecies Fishery Management Plan, whose foundation is based upon a plan put forward by the Northeast Seafood Coalition, incorporates a combination of phased and adaptive fishing mortality rates. This rebuilding strategy, which contains the phasing-down of fishing mortality rates, was a strategy recommended by National Marine Fisheries Services' Northeast Fisheries Science Center and was later approved by a federal court of law. This strategy was necessary in order to achieve both the rebuilding objectives of the plan and the fundamental Magnuson-Stevens Act objectives to minimize adverse social and economic impacts associated with the rebuilding. Unlike HR 5051 introduced by Congressman Gilchrest, the legislation before us not only preserves but would also enhance the flexibility that was needed to implement this plan.

The Northeast Seafood Coalition strongly believes that fishery managers need to be equipped with as many tools as possible to end overfishing and rebuild fish stocks. This legislation clearly accounts for the profound complexities and realities associated with our groundfish fisheries. The legislation does not hinder the tools afforded to managers and it ignores the lofty and rather idealistic management theories proposed in other legislation that are not based in the real world of fisheries management.

The Northeast Seafood Coalition is firmly committed to the sustainable conservation of our fishery resources and the need to rebuild overfished stocks. Our work has been dedicated to crafting innovative management solutions to the unique challenges our fisheries present. All our solutions have been mindful of the law and are considerate of the need to balance conservation goals with the needs of fishing communities.

Thank you again for this opportunity to share our views in support of this legislation. The Northeast Seafood Coalition looks forward to submitting a more comprehensive statement on many aspects in the legislation. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.