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United States
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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

U. S. COAST GUARD

STATEMENT OF

**REAR ADMIRAL JAMES C. OLSON
COMMANDER, SEVENTEENTH COAST GUARD DISTRICT**

ON

**FISHERIES MANAGEMENT SUCCESSES IN ALASKA & THE MAGNUSON-
STEVENS FISHERY CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT ACT**

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES & OCEANS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

KETCHIKAN, ALASKA

JULY 06, 2005

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the subcommittee. I am Rear Admiral James Olson, Commander of the Seventeenth Coast Guard District. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the Coast Guard's fisheries enforcement role in Alaska in support of the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act.

The Coast Guard is firmly committed to providing at-sea enforcement in support of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and national goals for living marine resource conservation and management. The Coast Guard recognizes that the economic and biological health of our fisheries is of considerable national importance, and as the District Commander responsible for Coast Guard operations in Alaska, I am keenly aware of the significance of fisheries to the residents of Alaska. Alaskan fisheries provide a livelihood for a large commercial harvesting industry, subsistence for Alaskans, a product for consumption by the American public, and recreational opportunities for countless Alaskans and visitors alike. The Magnuson-Stevens Act embodies the principle that we all have a collective responsibility to exercise good stewardship over these valuable resources and that the various stakeholders should be part of the process that seeks to achieve that stewardship. The Coast Guard is committed to support these management goals by providing effective enforcement and by participating in the process every step of the way.

Coast Guard Living Marine Resource Enforcement

The Coast Guard's long-range mission is, "To provide effective and professional enforcement to advance national goals for the conservation and management of living marine resources and their environment." To accomplish this, we have established three objectives:

- Prevent illegal encroachments of the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and internal waters by foreign fishing vessels.
- Ensure compliance with domestic living marine resource laws and regulations within the U.S. EEZ by U.S. fishers.
- Ensure compliance with international agreements for the management of living marine resources.

As the operational commander responsible for all Coast Guard operations in Alaska, my job is to turn the national Coast Guard policy outlined above into at-sea enforcement that takes into account the regional characteristics of fisheries. To prevent illegal encroachments of the U.S. EEZ, Coast Guard cutters and aircraft in Alaska patrol both the U.S./Russian Maritime Boundary in the Bering Sea and the U.S./Canadian Maritime Boundary in Dixon Entrance. These are my top fishery law enforcement priorities, and incursions in both these areas have trended downward in recent years. We attribute this to a number of factors including a robust enforcement presence, strong partnerships with our counterparts in Russia and Canada, as well as declining fish stocks in the Russian and Canadian EEZs near U.S. maritime borders. The threats on both borders have seasonal changes and activity may vary from year to year, but protecting the sovereignty of Alaska's maritime boundaries requires significant resources and a near full time Coast Guard presence during peak activity periods that may last several months. Of the two boundaries, the U.S./Russian Maritime Boundary is more resource intensive to enforce due to its remote location, extreme weather conditions, and high level of activity which starts in mid-May and can continue through December.

Domestic fisheries in Alaska are where the Coast Guard exerts most of its effort in support of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. In the past decade, Alaskan fisheries have seen major changes. Regulatory regimes continue to grow increasingly complex, closed areas have expanded by over an order of

magnitude encompassing hundreds of thousands of square miles, and a movement toward rationalization continues to lengthen fishing seasons, while also reducing the number of search and rescue missions. These factors all place changing demands on fisheries enforcement and require new approaches. .

Regulations in the North Pacific are vast and complex. There are over 300 federal time, area, and species openings and closings per year. Vast portions of the EEZ in Alaska are closed for habitat conservation, protected species, or by-catch management. These areas are most often in or adjacent to historical fishing grounds requiring close monitoring. This includes a recent proposal to close 279,000 square miles in the Aleutian Islands. The Coast Guard is essentially required to ensure vessels are fishing when, where and how they are permitted to by law. This takes an active patrol presence by our largest and most capable cutters and aircraft.

Nearly every fishery in Alaska is either currently rationalized or is on the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) agenda to be rationalized within the next five years. The Coast Guard supports these rationalization programs as they provide safer working conditions, afford fishermen more latitude in when they fish, and thus avoid harsh weather conditions. However, rationalized fisheries have different requirements for enforcement than traditionally managed fisheries. For example, in the first rationalized fishery in Alaska, and the largest Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) program in the world, the halibut/ sablefish IFQ fishery expanded from a few days to an eight month long season. While the number of Search and Rescue cases has dropped dramatically, these particular fisheries require a much longer enforcement season.

Coast Guard Cutters and aircraft also patrol areas outside the U.S. EEZ to monitor compliance with international agreements for the management of marine resources. Important examples include the Central Bering Sea (“Donut Hole”) Pollock Convention and the North Pacific Ocean in support of the United Nations’ worldwide moratorium on large-scale high seas pelagic drift net (HSDN) fishing. The Coast Guard works closely with the North Pacific Anadromous Fish Commission (NPAFC) to coordinate international enforcement efforts in a threat area covering over one million square miles. The Coast Guard in Alaska also participates in the North Pacific Heads of the Coast Guard forum that has a working group dedicated to high seas fishery enforcement issues around the Pacific Rim.

This period of growth in our fisheries enforcement mission in the post 9/11 operating environment requires a balance of cutters and aircraft to meet myriad mission demands with aging legacy assets. Some of the challenges of the aging fleet are that our cutters continue to experience more and more lost operational days due to mechanical failures. However, there are a number of long and short-range initiatives underway to improve our effectiveness and mitigate the reduced hours dedicated to fisheries enforcement.

Strong partnerships with other agencies, the use of technology, a world-class fisheries training program, new maritime security assets, and most importantly the development and implementation Integrated Deepwater System will greatly contribute to our effectiveness in Alaskan fisheries enforcement.

Strong Partnerships: Effective living marine resource management and enforcement requires a team effort. In Alaska, the Coast Guard enjoys and values excellent relationships with the NPFMC, National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the United States Attorney, the State of Alaska, and the fishing industry. We have also developed solid working relationships with our Pacific Rim partners in Russia, Japan, South Korea, China, and Canada to help thwart illegal fishing on the high seas. This summer, the USCGC JARVIS is participating in a

multilateral effort involving all these countries to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing in the North Pacific. This operation will also set the stage for multilateral cooperation in other mission areas such as migrant interdiction, counter narcotics, and maritime security.

Use of Technology: To better leverage existing technology, the Coast Guard is promoting the expanded use of VMS in Alaska fisheries. This will allow us to better monitor compliance with the ever-growing regulatory regimes and expansive closed areas. VMS can also benefit resource managers and has been used a number of times in SAR cases. As new sweeping fishery management programs are being developed, new tools for enforcement need to be developed as well. Existing technologies such as VMS, electronic logbooks and video monitoring all have potential applications as fishery enforcement tools that can help mitigate some of the enforcement challenge of complex fishery regulations that occur over an enormous space in Alaska. A good example is the VMS provisions required under the new crab rationalization program. Crab rationalization will likely take what has recently been a one-week fishery and expand it to several months and distribute fishing effort over a much larger area. VMS will be a critical component in helping to ensure the safety of its participants, and to ensure compliance with this extremely valuable fishery.

Fisheries Training: The Coast Guard's North Pacific Regional Fisheries Training Center (NPRFTC) in Kodiak has been a key component in training Coast Guard boarding officers in these increasingly complex regulations. At the start of each major cutter patrol, the Center provides just-in-time training in the specific fisheries the cutter will enforce throughout their patrol. NPRFTC also deploys instructors with the cutters to reinforce the training provided and to assist with actual boardings. Imperative to the great success of the Training Center is the ongoing enthusiastic participation of the fishing industry, NMFS, and other federal/state partners in the training process.

New Maritime Security Assets: What will have the greatest impact on our ability to continue to provide effective enforcement in Alaska fisheries is the new capability that comes with the Maritime Safety and Security Teams (MSST) and most significantly, the Integrated Deepwater System. MSST Anchorage was commissioned earlier this year and has already begun to execute a number of Ports Waterways and Coastal Security missions throughout the State; missions previously accomplished by our cutters and small boats. For example, to date, the MSST has conducted over 50 cruise ship escorts, provided several weeks of harbor patrols in Valdez, and provided security for a military out load in Anchorage. This has allowed my patrol boats to focus more effort on fisheries enforcement.

Deepwater: At-sea fisheries enforcement is conducted by the Coast Guard Deepwater assets. The Deepwater program will modernize our aging and obsolete legacy cutters, aircraft, and C4ISR systems, greatly increasing the Coast Guard's Deepwater mission performance and awareness within the maritime domain. Deepwater has never been more relevant for conducting Coast Guard operations, and in this case the fisheries enforcement in a vast and often harsh environment. Despite notable successes, of which there are many, there are areas of concern that warrant continued focus and attention. Most notably is the continuing readiness struggle of our Deepwater fleet. Our major cutters and aircraft are the centerpiece of our maritime presence in the North Pacific and Central Bering Sea. These assets are continuing to face severe maintenance and readiness challenges that, when combined with an increased post-9/11 operations tempo, impair the Coast Guard's ability to ensure effective enforcement presence in all areas of concern. Any reduction in Deepwater funding will result in operational capacity going away faster than it can be replaced. The two oldest cutters in the fleet are both home ported in Alaska and are slated to be decommissioned in the not-too-distant future and replaced with new Deepwater cutters. The scheduled replacement of these cutters is in jeopardy if Deepwater funding is reduced below the President's requested levels. Without the requested funding, the acquisition and thus current and future

Coast Guard readiness and ability to perform at-sea fisheries enforcement is put at substantial risk. The Coast Guard greatly appreciates your support over the years and asks for your continued support of The President's Deepwater funding request of \$966M in fiscal year 2006.

Magnuson –Stevens Reauthorization

The fisheries management system is working well in Alaska. Federally managed stocks in Alaska are healthy and there is a commitment to the resource from managers, industry and enforcement agencies alike. The open public process and culture of science and conservation that exists in the North Pacific guides the decisions of the Council. This in and of itself fosters compliance, and therefore, facilitates the job of the Coast Guard. The Coast Guard routinely provides comment throughout the development of management measures and regulations regarding both enforcement and safety, but remains neutral to allocation issues and specific conservation and economic objectives. Our role in the Council process is to provide expert advice on the operational realities of at-sea law enforcement and vessel safety during the development of various management measures and alternatives. Nevertheless, the Coast Guard can and does influence the development of regulations. Our participation as a non-voting member on the regional councils is the starting point of effective enforcement. We value this role and take this responsibility very seriously.

The Administration is considering a number of amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Act to enhance the effectiveness of fisheries law enforcement. In Alaska, tools such as broader application of VMS and cooperative state–federal enforcement programs are used to achieve enforcement, management, and safety objectives. Incorporating existing technology and leveraging strong enforcement partnerships are becoming more and more important as the requirements for fisheries enforcement change in response to changes in fisheries regulations and other law enforcement demands.

Closing

Federal fisheries management, through the work of the North Pacific Council, is a collective success story. The Coast Guard has always been a welcome partner at the NPFMC and our recommendations regarding enforcement and safety are always carefully considered. Fishery management in the North Pacific continues to be successful because the three core components of sound management, use of the best available science and effective enforcement are part and parcel of every management measure. We look forward to and are committed to maintaining this effective partnership into the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss this important issue with you today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.