

**BOB REES**  
**President, North Coast Chapter**  
**Association of NW Steelheaders**

**TESTIMONY ON THE MAGNUSON-STEVENSON ACT REAUTHORIZATION DISCUSSION  
DRAFT “STRENGTHENING FISHING COMMUNITIES AND INCREASING  
FLEXIBILITY IN FISHERIES MANAGEMENT ACT”  
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES**

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

**FEBRUARY 28, 2014**

Dear Chairman Hastings, Ranking Member DeFazio and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on Magnuson-Stevens Act reauthorization.

I am a 6<sup>th</sup> generation native Oregonian. I have been fishing Oregon’s rivers and Pacific Ocean since 1978. In 1996, I started a fishing guide business and consider myself fortunate to spend time with beginners and expert fishermen catching salmon, steelhead and sturgeon and bottomfish. My business and livelihood depend on healthy fish populations and sensible, science-based management of fish and coastal waters is essential to me, my family, my clients, my colleagues and my community. I’ve been both the beneficiary of sound management practices and the victim of poor management decisions. I can tell you now; we are on the right path for recovery and can’t afford to turn back the clock on the progress that we’ve already secured.

Today, I am privileged to provide testimony on behalf of the Association of Northwest Steelheaders. Founded in 1960, the Association of NW Steelheaders is one of the oldest and most-cherished sportfishing organizations in the Pacific Northwest. ANWS currently has 1,600 active members and 12 chapters in Oregon and SW Washington. The Steelheaders mission is “anglers dedicated to enhancing and protecting fisheries and their habitats for today and the future,” and our vision is "responsible and enjoyable sport angling with good access to healthy, abundant and sustainable fisheries in the Northwest's healthy watersheds."

Steelheaders respectfully submit the following comments regarding the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Before highlighting several concerns with the draft proposal that is the subject of today’s hearing, I would like to present some overarching thoughts on fishery management:

- The U.S. has one of the most advanced fisheries management programs in the world because it is based on science and includes strong, clear accountability measures that will prevent overfishing of recreationally and commercially important stocks. The Magnuson-Stevens Act provides the solid foundation for our management system and our nation’s commitment to support the long-term health of our ocean ecosystem, coastal economies and communities.
- Changes to the Magnuson-Stevens Act in 1996 and 2006—including timeline targets to rebuild depleted fish populations and recent requirements to set annual science-based catch limits that prevent overfishing—are working and are helping the U.S. achieve its reputation as a global leader. We are turning the corner to end overfishing and rebuild depleted fish populations in U.S. ocean waters.

- In large part due to these requirements and the hard work of fishery managers, fishermen, scientists and others, 34 depleted fish populations have been restored to healthy levels since 2000, including Pacific lingcod off the Pacific Coast.

- According to the NOAA Fisheries, the number of fish populations subject to overfishing has declined from 72 stocks in 2000 to just 28 in December 2013. We credit the combination of sound management practices and a rebounding ocean environment.

- Ending overfishing and rebuilding fisheries is not easy, but West Coast fishermen and coastal stakeholders have already made the hard choices to end overfishing and steer us toward a more sustainable future. Unfortunately, other regions of the country like New England put off the hard choices in the 1980s and 1990s, and are still paying the price with significantly depleted fish stocks and a federal disaster declaration. It is time for the rest of the country to follow the lead of the West Coast and embrace science-based management, end overfishing and move fisheries management forward. This step requires a firm commitment and patience. It means we need to make some difficult sacrifices in the short-term to conserve and rebuild stocks to realize the long-term benefits of healthier fish populations and coastal environments.

The recently released discussion draft of the MSA reauthorization bill would take us back to the old days where politics, not science, drove management decisions and resulted in many of the overfishing problems that we are still trying to fix today.

- Some specific concerns with the discussion draft proposal include:

- The proposal would allow overfishing to continue on depleted populations for at least 5, and possibly up to 7 years. When you have an overfishing problem, the last thing you want to do is to allow more overfishing on vulnerable stocks that will make recovery more difficult, costly, and delay the achievement of a rebuilt population. We need to stick to the current law that requires managers to end overfishing “immediately”.

- The proposal would allow a whole suite of new exemptions for establishing a rebuilding timeline target. These new exemptions are broad, are not in line with science and would allow managers to avoid rebuilding depleted fish populations. In addition, the proposal would allow managers to rebuild “as soon as practicable”, instead of the current goal to rebuild “as soon as possible.” In practice, this means they could allow economic and political reasons to put off rebuilding indefinitely, denying coastal communities, businesses and stakeholders of the benefits that would come with fully-rebuilt fisheries.

- The proposal would restrict the public’s ability to access fisheries data through changes to the law’s confidentiality rules, including data that is collected with taxpayer dollars.

- Finally, the proposal would undercut the ability of the public to assess and mitigate the impacts of fishery management decisions by exempting key provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act from applying to the MSA.

Instead of weakening the Magnuson-Stevens Act, we believe we should use this opportunity to build on a record of achievement. In many ways, the Pacific Fishery Management Council provides a solid example of what direction we should be taking. For example, the Council is moving forward with initiatives meant to improve management by incorporating more ecosystem factors into management decisions.

Specifically, the Council is leading the way in protecting small prey fish, called forage fish, that support a healthy ecosystem and advancing ecosystem plans that consider factors beyond single-species management. These forage fish, and the habitats that support them, are critical to the health of ALL ocean species, especially our commercially harvested fish that fuel our coastal communities. Proposed modifications to Annual Catch Limits that exclude forage fish, sets an extremely dangerous precedent that will likely severely compromise these volatile, economically important coastal fisheries. The Steelheaders have been very involved with these changes and are proud of the work we have done to get these important changes enacted.

In summary, we believe the Magnuson-Stevens Act is working. Sure, there is more work that needs to be done. But, we need to roll up our sleeves and continue the hard work to better ground fishery management in science, prevent overfishing, and rebuild stocks. It is time to build upon the successes of the 1996 and 2006 reauthorizations and move forward with ecosystem based fishery management. We need to protect habitats, avoid non-target species, account for the important role of forage fish in the ocean food web, and require ecosystem-level fishery management plans.

Unfortunately, the proposal under consideration jeopardizes the progress we are currently seeing under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. Our goal, as consumptive users, is to continue to utilize this valuable natural resource for future generations to come. The best way to do that is to manage our nation's fisheries proactively and conservatively; we already know we have the capability to easily overfish this resource. In the late 80's and 90's, as a department of fish and wildlife employee and federal fisheries observer in the Bering Sea, I witnessed first-hand the hardships our ports and fishermen suffered due to over-exploitation of this resource. Our fragile coastal communities cannot afford to relive the overfishing problems we experienced during these times. We can't **again** downsize a fleet that *already* operates on a shoestring.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our comments.

Respectfully,

Bob Rees, President  
North Coast Chapter of the Association of NW Steelheaders