

**United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife**

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Chairwoman Bordallo, Ranking Member Brown, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the invitation to participate in today's hearing on H.R. 4914, the Coastal Jobs Creation Act. My name is Matt Tinning, and I am Vice President of External Affairs at Ocean Conservancy, a national marine conservation organization that has promoted healthy and diverse ocean ecosystems since its founding in 1972. Of most relevance to the legislation before us today, Ocean Conservancy has a proud history of working with fishing communities, retailers, policymakers and the public to advance sustainable fisheries. We are supported by more than 500,000 members and volunteers, and our headquarters is in Washington, DC.

A healthy ocean is critically important to every one of us. The ocean regulates our climate, and provides us with food to eat, water to drink, and oxygen to breathe. Regardless of where we live, we all have a profound stake in ocean ecosystems that are resilient, diverse and teeming with life. It is coastal communities, however, that often suffer the most immediate consequences of a marine environment under stress. For regions where fishing is an economic staple and a way of life, the wellbeing of the marine ecosystem and the community are closely linked. Decades of overfishing has come at a severe cost not only to ocean health, but also to those who have historically relied on abundant fisheries for their livelihoods.

The Coastal Jobs Creation Act seeks to provide economic support to fishermen and fishing communities while measures to end overfishing and rebuild depleted fish populations are implemented. The bill has the potential to advance a number of important policy objectives simultaneously, including provision of economic assistance to coastal communities in need; funding projects that will revitalize waterfronts and improve the ocean environment; and helping ensure that critical legislative mandates established by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act are met. Ocean Conservancy therefore strongly support this bill.

**Sustainable Fisheries**

The context for the Coastal Jobs Creation Act is our national challenge of transitioning to sustainable fisheries through science-based management. For many decades, our nation's fisheries have suffered from the effects of overfishing. At the end of 2006, Congress enacted important changes to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), our nation's federal fisheries law. These changes came just over a decade after Congress passed

the Sustainable Fisheries Act, which also aimed to end overfishing – but which failed to fully deliver on that promise. The changes signed into law in 2007 significantly strengthened key provisions of the Act. At the core of the reauthorization was a mandate for science-based fishery management to end overfishing of America’s fisheries once and for all.

In fisheries where science-based management has been implemented we are already seeing evidence of success. In the Gulf of Mexico, for example, the iconic red snapper has long been a poster child for poor management. Unsustainable fishing practices drove the species’ population to a small fraction of its historic spawning abundance. In 2008, a plan was finally implemented to manage red snapper in accordance with science-based catch limits. Shared responsibility for reducing catch was the key to making the new red snapper plan work. Allowable catch was reduced by roughly 40 percent in the short term, a decision that enabled the red snapper population to begin to recover. An updated population assessment led the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council to approve an increase in the red snapper total allowable catch earlier this year. It was a move that Ocean Conservancy supported, and one that illustrated how a short-term reduction in catch limits can put a severely depleted fishery on the path to recovery, leading to increased fishing and economic opportunities.

The BP *Deepwater Horizon* disaster has since added a tragic new dimension to this emerging success story in the Gulf of Mexico. The trajectory of red snapper before the disaster, however, is illustrative of the significant long-term benefits to coastal communities that science-based management can bring. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), rebuilding fish populations would at least triple the economic value of many US fisheries, increasing sales by approximately \$31 billion and supporting an estimated 500,000 new US jobs. It is an investment in our future that Congress has mandated, and one that we must see through to completion.

### **Assistance for Coastal Communities**

In the interim, however, assistance may be needed for many coastal communities. The economic downturn has reduced job opportunities, and in the Gulf of Mexico the economic fallout from the BP *Deepwater Horizon* disaster is severe. In some instances measures to end overfishing pursuant to the MSA will mean short-term reductions in the amount of fish that can be caught during a fishing season. As we transition coastal communities to stronger economic health by ending overfishing and rebuilding our fisheries, we should look for opportunities to assist fishermen through any short term economic challenges that may exist.

H.R. 4914 seeks to provide that assistance in a thoughtful and targeted way. It establishes a Coastal Jobs Creation Grant Program; and defines funding criteria that prioritize job creation, conservation gain, and programmatic effectiveness. The five priority areas for which the legislation seeks to increase support are all of vital importance, and are considered in turn below.

### *1. Cooperative Research and Monitoring*

Cooperative research and monitoring programs engage fishermen to collect fisheries information. In addition to providing data that informs fishery management decisions, cooperative research builds partnerships between fishermen and government scientists, increasing stakeholder confidence in the data and creating a more transparent process. Successful cooperative research programs have been conducted by the National Marine Fisheries Service since 1999. They have included work to improve the quality of fish population assessments, assess non-target catch mortality, develop environmentally-friendly fishing gear, and study the impacts of marine protected areas.

### *2. The Revitalization of Coastal Infrastructure*

For many coastal communities, efforts to sustain their economy and culture are dependent on effective and functioning waterfront infrastructure. Whether it be boat ramps, docking facilities, ports or concessions, funds for the revitalization of coastal infrastructure can have benefits far beyond the immediate infusion of funds and direct creation of jobs. Successful working waterfront partnerships in a number of states could be among the beneficiaries of grants under the Act.

### *3. Recreational Fishing Registry Programs*

The current method for collecting data on recreational fishing often does not provide the timely information that managers need to best prevent exceeding science based fishing limits, which in turn may lead to more restrictive fishing opportunities in the future and compromise the ability to achieve management goals. The grant money and funding criteria outlined in the bill could improve the quality and accuracy of information generated by the marine recreational fishing surveys, integrate the local ecological knowledge of fishermen into the scientific process, and support establishment and implementation of critical State recreational fishing registry programs.

### *4. Marine Debris Removal*

Marine debris is one of the most pervasive pollution problems of our time. Among the challenges that NOAA's Marine Debris Program has sought to counter since its inception is the threat that derelict fishing gear poses to marine wildlife, habitat and navigational safety. Several programs have been highly successful in employing fishermen to remove derelict fishing nets, crab pots and lobster traps from the marine environment, and these could be expanded through additional grant funding.

## *5. Restoration of Coastal Resources*

Our coastal resources are under increasing strain, and their protection and restoration must be a national priority. Restoration of our coasts is essential in maintaining the productivity of the marine environment, whether it be the decades-long restoration challenge we face in the wake of the BP *Deepwater Horizon* disaster, or a smaller-scale project funded under this Act. Among the activities eligible for grants are restoration projects identified for their conservation, recreational, ecological, historical, or aesthetic values.

## **Conclusion**

The Coastal Jobs Creation Act not only provides economic assistance to coastal communities in need; it does so by funding activities that advance other important priorities. As we finally move to end overfishing and rebuild fish populations, the Coastal Jobs Creation Act can help bridge immediate economic challenges and pave the way for coastal communities to share in the economic benefits of more abundant fisheries.

Ocean Conservancy strongly supports the Coastal Jobs Creation Act, and we commend Congressman Pallone, as well as Congresswoman Pingree, Congresswoman Shea-Porter, and the bill's other cosponsors for their leadership on this issue. We urge all members of the subcommittee to work for its enactment.