



H.R. 2304: A Bill that Would Weaken Fisheries Science and Jeopardize Efforts to Prevent Overfishing

Congress should reject H.R. 2304 because it would undermine the progress we've made preventing overfishing for some of America's most valuable and vulnerable ocean fish populations. The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the federal law that governs management of our nation's ocean fish, requires managers to set science-based annual catch limits (ACLs) to ensure sustainable fishing for all U.S. ocean fish populations by the end of 2011. Now, just as we are nearing the finish line, the misnamed "Fishery Science Improvement Act" would jeopardize this goal by undermining the ACL requirement in three ways:

1. **Exempting managers from setting science-based catch limits** for fish populations that have not been assessed in the past five years. This exemption could risk overfishing on at least 58 of our most valuable commercial and recreational fish (see page 2 for a complete list). It would also exempt managers from using scientifically valid methods for establishing catch limits based on existing and readily available information such as the biology of the species and recent commercial and recreational catch data.
2. **Creating a new loophole** that could allow the Secretary of Commerce to exempt scores of fish species from the requirement to establish science-based catch limits, including those that are undergoing overfishing. H.R. 2304 would establish a new, ill-defined category of fish populations known as "ecosystem stocks" that are exempt from catch limits.
3. **Extending the deadline to set catch limits that prevent overfishing** to 2014, putting vulnerable fish populations at risk. We know from experience that "kicking the can down the road" and risking overfishing can have disastrous consequences for our nation's fish populations and fishing communities.

Thanks to the ACL requirement of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, managers have steadily improved data collection and analysis for species that have historically lacked assessments because they are not commercially valuable or are small fisheries. H.R. 2304 could undermine this progress by taking away the incentive for managers to collect information on these fish populations. Instead, managers are more likely to allocate their scarce research and assessment funds to those species where they are legally required to set science-based annual catch limits.

Congress took decisive bipartisan action in 2006 to end decades of overfishing and restore our nation's valuable fish populations by strengthening the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. H.R. 2304 would undermine science-based

management and put vulnerable fish populations at risk just as we are nearing the finish line of ending and preventing overfishing for all federally-managed fish populations. **Congress should reject this short-sighted bill and instead help improve fisheries science by investing in fisheries data collection and monitoring programs.**

58 U.S. Ocean Fish Populations That Could be Exempted From Annual Catch Limits and Accountability Measures by H.R. 2304

New England (2)

Red deepsea crab - Northwestern Atlantic
Atlantic salmon - Gulf of Maine

Mid Atlantic (1)

Northern shortfin squid - Northwestern Atlantic Coast

South Atlantic (10)

Gray triggerfish - Southern Atlantic Coast
Red porgy - Southern Atlantic Coast
Scamp - Southern Atlantic Coast
White grunt - Southern Atlantic Coast
Wreckfish - Southern Atlantic Coast
Sargassum - Southern Atlantic Coast
Gray snapper - Southern Atlantic Coast
Lane snapper - Southern Atlantic Coast
Nassau grouper - Southern Atlantic Coast
Yellowedge grouper - Southern Atlantic Coast

Gulf of Mexico (8)

Red drum - Gulf of Mexico
Nassau grouper - Gulf of Mexico
Vermilion snapper - Gulf of Mexico
Cobia - Gulf of Mexico (jointly managed with the South Atlantic Council)
Little tunny - Gulf of Mexico (as above)
Spanish mackerel - Gulf of Mexico (as above)
Dolphinfish - Southern Atlantic Coast/Gulf of Mexico (as above)
Yellowtail snapper - Southern Atlantic Coast/Gulf of Mexico (as above)

Caribbean (1)

Caribbean Grouper Unit 2

Highly Migratory Species (1)

Blacktip shark - Gulf of Mexico

Pacific (18)

Jack mackerel - Pacific Coast
Northern anchovy - Southern Pacific Coast
Bank rockfish - California
Blackgill rockfish - Southern California

California scorpionfish - Southern California
Dover sole - Pacific Coast
Gopher rockfish - Northern California
Longspine thornyhead - Pacific Coast
Pacific cod - Pacific Coast
Shortspine thornyhead - Pacific Coast
Starry flounder - Pacific Coast
Yellowtail rockfish - Northern Pacific Coast
Skipjack tuna - Eastern Tropical Pacific
Chinook salmon - Northern California Coast: Klamath (fall)
Chinook salmon - California Central Valley: Sacramento (fall)
Chinook salmon - Oregon Coast: Southern
Coho salmon - Oregon Production
Index Area: Oregon Coastal (natural)
Silvergray rockfish - Pacific Coast

North Pacific (6)

Bering Sea / Aleutian Islands Other Species Complex
Big skate - Gulf of Alaska
Gulf of Alaska Other Slope Rockfish Complex
Longnose skate - Gulf of Alaska
Shortraker rockfish - Gulf of Alaska
Alaska Coho Salmon Assemblage

Western Pacific (11)

Albacore - South Pacific
Indo-Pacific blue marlin - Pacific
Kawakawa - Tropical Pacific
Opah - Pacific
Shortbill spearfish - Pacific
Wahoo - Pacific
Bigeye scad - Hawaii Archipelago
Mackerel scad - Hawaii Archipelago
Hawaiian Archipelago Coral Reef Ecosystem Multi-species Complex
Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Crustacean Complex
Makapu'u Bed Precious Corals Multi-species Complex

Sources: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), "2011 Status of U.S. Fisheries: First Quarter Update," Mar. 31, 2011, www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/statusoffisheries/SOSmain.htm; NMFS, Species Information System Public Portal, <https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/sisPortal/sisPortalMain.jsp>, accessed June 25, 2011; and personal communication with NMFS personnel.

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For additional resources, visit us at www.EndOverfishing.org.