

May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2014

The Honorable Doc Hastings  
Chairman  
Natural Resources Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Peter DeFazio  
Ranking Member  
House Natural Resources Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Hastings and Ranking Member DeFazio:

Healthy oceans and well-managed fisheries improve coastal economies, enhance recreational fishing opportunities, and provide fresh, local seafood to consumers. And while many fisheries around the world are in serious decline, the United States benefits from one of the most sustainable and profitable fisheries management systems in the world. It is a system that is built on sound science and incorporates strong local input from fishermen and others. Under current law, our management practices are rebuilding many depleted stocks of fish and ensuring a sustainable fishing future for fishing communities long struggling with a variety of economic and environmental challenges.

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, first passed in 1976, has been at the center of much of this progress, and is presently before Congress for reauthorization. Initially, the law used subsidies and other programs to provide access to and manage what was perceived as a near-limitless supply of fish. Over time, however, many of our iconic fisheries—such as the New England cod and Gulf of Mexico red snapper—became severely depleted. In response, fishermen, conservation groups, and congressional leaders came together in 1996 and again in 2006 to improve the law and protect our fishermen's livelihoods. These changes formed the foundation of our current sustainable fisheries management system.

**As former directors of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Fisheries Service serving four presidents, both Republican and Democrat, and with a combined 20 plus years of service, we are fortunate to have been present for and helped to implement these key bipartisan reforms to the Magnuson Act. These reforms have demonstrably improved the health of our oceans, sustainability of our fish stocks and the viability of many local fishing economies.** We especially appreciate the hard work of fishermen, regional fishery managers, scientists, and conservation groups who continue to implement these policy advances on the water.

Overfishing (catching fish faster than they can reproduce) is now at an all-time low, and both 2011 and 2012 saw record recovery of depleted fish stocks. A recent status report detailed a total of 34 species that have been returned to healthy levels in the past thirteen years, including scallops, whiting, and king

mackerel. All fish populations in the United States are now managed under science-based plans. The Act also has safeguards against overfishing and long-term depletion. And we know these plans are working: recent analysis shows that 90 percent of fisheries have successfully stayed within science-based catch limits.

These successes are resulting in tangible benefits for both local fishing communities and our national economy—including more fresh and local seafood for consumers and better fishing opportunities for recreational anglers. In 2011, we saw the highest landings volume since 1997 and the highest value ever recorded. The United States is on track to boost first-sale income to fisherman by \$2.2 billion and add 500,000 new jobs in the fishing industry when all depleted stocks are rebuilt.

**Attempts to weaken or remove the core provisions in the Act are not based on sound science and put our fishermen and fisheries at serious risk. Removal of provisions that set science-based catch limits, require rebuilding deadlines for restoring depleted fish populations, and provide incentives to align economic and ecological objectives will undo these hard won recent gains.**

We have come a long way since the early days of the current law. Americans rely on a healthy ocean for jobs, food, and a way of life. Undoing key provisions of Magnuson puts all of us at risk. We must build on the current law, continue to improve the system that manages our nation's fisheries, invest in science and technology, and strengthen cooperative research programs, so that we all can benefit from a healthy ocean and a strong economy.

Sincerely,

William W. Fox, Jr. PhD  
Assistant Administrator, National Marine Fisheries Service  
1990 – 1993

Rollie Schmitten  
Assistant Administrator, National Marine Fisheries Service  
1993-1999

Penny Dalton  
Assistant Administrator, National Marine Fisheries Service  
1999-2001

Dr. William T. Hogarth  
Assistant Administrator, National Marine Fisheries Service  
2001-2007

Eric Schwaab  
Assistant Administrator, National Marine Fisheries Service  
2010-2013