

July 28, 2011

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators,

We, the undersigned 246 organizations representing a diverse range of commercial and recreational fishing associations, commercial seafood dealers, the charter and for-hire industry, fishery dependent businesses and ocean conservation organizations, collectively urge all Members of Congress to support the President's FY 2012 NOAA budget request of \$91.5 million for the Expand Annual Stocks Assessments and Fisheries Statistics line-items. We request that you make these data collection and analysis line items a top priority in FY 2012.

The National Marine Fisheries Service estimates that U.S. commercial and saltwater recreational fishing contributes over \$160 billion to the economy annually and supports nearly 2 million jobs. These industries rely on healthy fish populations, which provide food for our tables, offer recreational opportunities for millions of Americans and sustain jobs and communities on every coast. Congress should invest in America's fish populations and fishing businesses by providing the funding necessary to ensure that managers use the best science possible to guide stewardship of our ocean fish resources.

Expand Annual Stock Assessments (\$67.1 million, as requested)

Stock assessments provide the basic information that scientists use to determine the health of fish populations. Assessments provide estimates of abundance and catch levels that a fish population can support. Increased funding will reduce scientific and management uncertainty and will allow managers to set catch levels and accountability measures that maximize fishing opportunities while rebuilding those that have been determined to be overfished and maintaining healthy fish populations.

Fisheries Statistics (\$24.4 million, as requested)

The 2006 amendments to the Magnuson Stevens Act required the Agency, within two years, to improve the quality and accuracy of their primary private angler data collection program. These amendments led to the establishment of the Marine Recreational Information Program which is funded primarily through the Fisheries Statistics budget line. Investment of funds for this line item will improve data on recreational catch levels and participation, and will help scientists to better estimate recreational fishing mortality and set more accurate catch limits. This program will also result in more timely decisions that both the regional fishery management councils and the fishing industry need to improve management and potentially lead to more fishing opportunities.

Thank you for your consideration of our requests. Rarely does such a diverse group of U.S. stakeholders agree on fishery-related issues, but on the need to adequately fund fisheries data collection there is no disagreement. If we are going to have abundant fisheries, Congress must provide the resources necessary to sustainably manage ocean fish by ensuring that management decisions are based on timely and accurate information and analysis. The health of America's ocean fish populations and the jobs, income, recreation, seafood and communities that they sustain depend on your investments in FY 2012.

Sincerely,

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