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June 21, 2018

The Honorable Paul Ryan
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Speaker Ryan and Minority Leader Pelosi,

On behalf of The Pew Charitable Trusts, I urge your members to vote NO on H.R. 200, a bill to reauthorize and amend the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), when it is considered on the House floor.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act is working to prevent overfishing and rebuild depleted fish populations across the Nation. If enacted, H.R. 200 would threaten these rebuilding successes and the future of healthy fish populations and fisheries. The bill would significantly weaken the Magnuson-Stevens Act's conservation objectives by undercutting efforts to rebuild overfished stocks, increasing the risk of overfishing, decreasing accountability, and undermining science-based decision-making.

Because of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and its commitment to science-based fisheries management, U.S. ocean fish are on the rebound. Since 2000, 44 commercially and recreationally important and once-overfished populations have rebuilt to healthy levels. The number of stocks subject to overfishing (catching fish faster than they can reproduce) has decreased from 72 stocks in 2000 to 30 in 2017. This has led to more fish in the water, better fishing opportunities, and more recently, an increase in fishing jobs. Improved conservation has led to increased U.S. seafood revenues and landings and to a recreational fishing industry that generated \$63.4 billion in sales impacts in 2015.

H.R. 200 would significantly weaken policies established by a visionary and bipartisan group of U.S. Representatives and Senators, who worked together during the 1996 and 2006 reauthorizations to overwhelmingly support a national fishery management system focused on science-based conservation of ocean resources. Instead of building on this foundation, H.R. 200 would, among other damaging provisions:

- Create broad exemptions to the requirement that fishery managers set reasonable timelines for rebuilding depleted fish populations. These loopholes would extend timelines that would in turn jeopardize the recovery of ecological and economic benefits tied to healthy fish populations.
- Curb the use of science-based catch limits that are in place to prevent overfishing and make recreational fisheries less accountable to these limits. Fishery managers would be allowed to exempt many species from science-based catch limits, including some short-lived forage fish that are important prey for larger commercially and recreationally caught fish, marine mammals, and birds.

- Transfer responsibility for the recreational management of Gulf of Mexico red snapper from the established system under the Magnuson-Stevens Act to a state-based system, which could undermine efforts to manage this important resource in a consistent and science-based manner. The stakes for sound commercial, recreational, and charter-for-hire sector management of red snapper are high, but thanks to federally required, science-based catch limits, Gulf red snapper has been recovering since its population plummeted in the 1990s due to overfishing. Management of Gulf red snapper outside the requirements of Magnuson-Stevens Act could jeopardize the progress that has been made rebuilding this important species.
- Hamstringing management efforts to protect fish habitat and minimize bycatch. Amendments made during the Committee mark-up would obstruct efforts to protect fish habitats in waters affected by significant coastal wetland loss and hollow out the definition of bycatch which would make it more difficult for fishery managers to collect data about and reduce bycatch for many recreational fisheries.

Pew believes that the Magnuson-Stevens Act should be updated to meet the challenges of the 21st century, but H.R. 200 does not achieve this goal. H.R. 200 represents an approach that would risk returning the U.S. to a past when overfishing and depleted fish populations were chronic problems.

Congress should not weaken the core conservation provisions of the Magnuson-Stevens Act that are leading to healthier fish populations and more stable fishing businesses and coastal communities. I urge you to oppose H.R. 200.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ted Morton". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "T" and "M".

Ted Morton
Director, U.S. Oceans, Federal Fisheries

CC: Members of the U.S. House of Representatives