

**Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association • Cape Cod
Commercial Hook Fishermen's Association • Environmental
Defense Fund • Greenpeace USA • Marine Fish Conservation
Network • Natural Resources Defense Council • Oceana •
Ocean Conservancy • Pew Environment Group**

March 1, 2010

The Honorable Alan Mollohan
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Wolf
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
US House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Mollohan and Ranking Member Wolf:

United States fisheries are a valuable component of our economy and ecology, providing enormous benefit to coastal communities from Key West to the Alaskan Peninsula. In addition to their role in healthy, functioning ocean ecosystems, our fish resources provide jobs, food and recreation that either directly or indirectly benefit all Americans. In 2006 the commercial fishing industry generated more than \$103 billion in sales, \$44.3 billion in income, and supported 1.5 million jobs; while the recreational fishing industry generated \$82 billion in sales and \$32 billion in value-added impacts. However, the failure to adequately invest in fishery management systems and decades of mismanagement are compromising the benefits our fisheries can provide and putting some of our fisheries at risk of collapse. Fully rebuilding US fish stocks could increase ex-vessel value by an estimated \$2.2 billion and generate an estimated additional \$31 billion in sales and support an additional 500,000 jobs, according to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)¹. We request an investment of \$47 million above the President's FY11 request in our nation's fisheries to fund critical data collection and monitoring programs including stock assessments, recreational data collection and cooperative research.

The reason is simple: data collection and analysis underlies all fisheries management decisions, and it must be enhanced in order to best support the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA). Improvements in the collection, accuracy and timeliness of catch data will help best meet MSA requirements by enabling fishery managers

¹ www.nmfs.noaa.gov/ocs/mafacs/meetings/2009_11/docs/mafacs_catch_shares_presentation.pdf.

to monitor Annual Catch Limits (ACLs) with a greater degree of precision and accuracy to ensure overfishing is ended and management goals are met. In addition, better catch data contribute to more robust stock assessments, increasing the accuracy of fish population size estimates and allowing for better identification of catch targets and thresholds that prevent overfishing.

We acknowledge that the subcommittee is operating in a challenging fiscal environment; however, we urge you to recognize that well-targeted appropriations to preserve our nation's fisheries are a vital investment in healthy coastal communities and our nation's long-term economic future. Accordingly, we respectfully request an increase in funding for the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) of \$47 million over the President's FY11 budget request be allocated to the following line items.

Stocks Assessments: +\$10 million for a total of \$61.7 million. Increased funding for data collection and monitoring will improve the precision of stock assessments and reduce management uncertainty – and in so doing is likely to increase certainty and enable managers to increase fishing opportunities.

Fisheries Statistics: +\$11 million for a total of \$32.4 million. Increased funding will improve data on recreational fishing participation and catch, and also commercial catch including through electronic reporting. The current method for collecting recreational fisheries data often does not provide the timely information that managers need to prevent overages from occurring, which in turn may lead to more restrictive recreational fishing opportunities in the future and compromise the ability to achieve management goals. Part of the solution for avoiding this spiral of further restrictions is to implement a data collection system that makes the timely collection and analysis of recreational catch data a priority so that managers are able to take action before quotas are exceeded. Additional funding of \$11 million is needed to begin seriously addressing these issues.

Survey and Monitoring Projects: +\$6 million for a total of \$30 million. Additional funding for fishery-independent surveys, monitoring, and research will improve estimates of ecosystem change, fishing mortality, and population size. In far too many instances, the majority of the information used for assessing fish population health is from fisheries operations themselves. Regional scientific advisors have recommended for years that the quality of assessments can be greatly improved by collecting fisheries “independent” information according to specific scientific research plans.

Fisheries observers: +\$10 million for a total of \$48.8 million. Additional funding will provide increased observer coverage, video monitoring systems and satellite tracking to improve the quality and quantity of fisheries data, population assessments and forecasts, and estimates of non-target catch and mortality.

Cooperative Research: +\$10 million. Additional funding will support research with the cooperation of fishermen to help improve the quality of fish assessments, and assessment of non-target catch mortality. In addition to contributing to more assessment and information, cooperative research funds partnerships between key stakeholders and the Agency, increasing stakeholder confidence in the data and creating a more transparent process.

All the above programs work in concert to provide the information needed to make management more effective. This additional funding will lead to economic gains – both immediately through the direct creation of jobs; and in the long term through improved fisheries management that will preserve and increase fishing opportunities in the future.

Thank you for considering our request.

Sincerely,

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