

September 29, 2009

U.S. House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

RE: Oppose *The Flexibility in Rebuilding American Fisheries Act of 2009 (H.R. 1584)*

Dear Representative:

As scientists from across the nation, we ask you to maintain America's legal commitment to quickly rebuilding depleted fish populations. The health of marine ecosystems depends in large part on sustaining fish populations at healthy levels, making rebuilding depleted fish populations a federal management priority. As such, we strongly urge you to oppose H.R. 1584, a bill which would weaken requirements to rebuild.

Decades of managing for short-term economic gain and ignoring scientific recommendations has left 46 fish populations at unsustainably low levels and 41 populations experiencing overfishing, according to the most recent data from the National Marine Fisheries Service. The reauthorized Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) addresses these challenges by elevating the role of science in fisheries management, mandating an end to overfishing, and strengthening the requirement to rebuild depleted fish populations.

The MSA requires rebuilding to be completed in a time frame that is "as short as possible," and no longer than 10 years, unless not biologically possible. This deadline was based on a conservative estimate of expected rebuilding times of federally managed fish derived from the best available science, as described by Safina *et al.* (2005) in "U.S. Ocean Fish Recovery: Staying the Course," *Science* (Vol. 309). Furthermore, the MSA gives reasonable exceptions for biological differences in the regeneration time of fish species, international agreements or other environmental factors, thus injecting a degree of flexibility to the legal requirements to rebuild fish populations to sustainable levels.

Recently, however, two bills have been introduced that would weaken the MSA's rebuilding requirements, effectively undermining current rebuilding efforts. H.R. 1584 would add loopholes and exceptions that delay rebuilding deadlines and favor short-term economic gains over the long-term health of fish populations and coastal communities.

Delaying rebuilding may have significant adverse impacts that reverberate throughout marine ecosystems, affecting prey and predator relationships and impeding depleted species' ability to recover.

While we recognize the need for flexibility in managing variable natural systems, we believe that the MSA already provides a sufficient level of flexibility. Now is the time to remain true to Congress' intent to end overfishing and rebuild depleted fish populations. If sustainably managed today, fish can be important renewable resources that provide sustenance and income for many generations to come.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

The following 118 signatories are listed alphabetically, by state. Note: individual signatories' institutions are given for identification purposes only and do not constitute an endorsement on the part of the institutions of information contained in this letter.

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