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BEFORE THE

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Introduction

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Samuel D. Rauch and I am the Deputy Assistant Administrator for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) in the Department of Commerce. NMFS is dedicated to the stewardship of living marine resources through science-based conservation and management. Much of this work occurs under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), which sets forth standards for conservation, management, and sustainable use of our Nation's fisheries resources.

Marine fish and fisheries—such as tropical tunas in the Western and Central Pacific, salmon in the Pacific Northwest, halibut in Alaska, cod in New England and red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico—are vital to the prosperity and cultural identity of coastal communities in the United States. U.S. fisheries play an enormous role in the U.S. economy. Commercial fishing supports fishermen, contributes to coastal communities and businesses, and provides Americans with a valuable source of local, sustainable, and healthy food. Non-commercial and recreational fishing provides food for many individuals, families, and communities; is an important social activity; and is a critical economic driver of local and regional economies, as well as a major contributor to the national economy. Subsistence and ceremonial fishing provides an essential food source and has deep cultural significance for indigenous peoples in the Pacific Islands and Alaska and for many Tribes on the West Coast.

Our most recent estimates show that the landed volume and the value of commercial U.S. wild-caught fisheries remained near the high levels posted in 2011. U.S. commercial fishermen landed 9.6 billion pounds of seafood valued at $5.1 billion in 2012, the second highest landings volume and value over the

past decade.[1] The seafood industry—harvesters, seafood processors and dealers, seafood wholesalers and seafood retailers, including imports and multiplier effects—generated an estimated $129 billion in sales impacts and $37 billion in income impacts, and supported 1.2 million jobs in 2011. Jobs supported by commercial businesses held steady from the previous year.[2]

At the same time, recreational catch remained stable. Recreational fishing generated an estimated $56 billion in sales impacts and $18 billion in income impacts, and supported 364,000 jobs in 2011.[3] Jobs generated by the recreational fishing industry represented a 12 percent increase over 2010.[4]

The advancement of our science and management tools has resulted in improved sustainability of fisheries and greater stability for industry. Key requirements in the 2007 reauthorization mandated the use of science-based annual catch limits and accountability measures to better prevent and end overfishing. The reauthorization provided more explicitly for market-based fishery management through Limited Access Privilege Programs, and addressed the need to improve the science used to inform fisheries management.

The U.S. has many effective tools to apply in marine fisheries management. Yet, as we look to the future, we must continue looking for opportunities to further improve our management system. While significant progress has been made since the 2007 reauthorization, progress has not come without a cost to some. Challenges remain. Fishermen, fishing communities, and the Councils have had to make difficult decisions and absorb the near-term cost of conservation and investment in long-term economic and biological sustainability.

We all share the common goal of healthy fisheries that can be sustained for generations. Without clear, science-based rules, fair enforcement, and a shared commitment to sustainable management, short-term pressures can easily undermine progress toward restoring the social, economic, and environmental benefits of a healthy fishery. Although challenges remain in some fisheries, the benefits for the resource, the industries it supports, and the economy are beginning to be seen as fish populations grow and catch limits increase.

My testimony today will focus on NMFS' progress in implementing the Magnuson-Stevens Act's key domestic provisions, and some thoughts about the future and the next reauthorization. NOAA has not yet completed review of the draft bill but looks forward to working with Congress on this complex issue.

Progress in Implementation

Working together, NMFS, the Councils, coastal states and territories, treaty fishing tribes, and a wide range of industry groups and other stakeholders have made significant progress in implementing key

[1] See NOAA Annual Commercial Fisheries Landings Database, available at http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/commercial-fisheries/commercial-landings/annual-landings/index.

[2] See Fisheries Economics of the U.S. 2011. NMFS Office of Science & Technology, available at: http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/economics/publications/feus/fisheries_economics_2011.

[3] Lovell, Sabrina, Scott Steinback, and James Hilger. 2013. The Economic Contribution of Marine Angler Expenditures in the United States, 2011. U.S. Dep. Commerce, NOAA Tech. Memo. NMFS-F/SPO-134, 188 p.

[4] See Fisheries Economics of the U.S. 2011. NMFS Office of Science & Technology, available at: http://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/economics/publications/feus/fisheries_economics_2011.

provisions of this legislation.

Ending Overfishing and Rebuilding Fisheries

U.S. fisheries are producing sustainable U.S. seafood. The Federal fishery management system is effectively ending overfishing and rebuilding overfished fisheries. We continue to make progress toward long-term biological and economic sustainability and stability. Since its initial passage in 1976, the Magnuson-Stevens Act has charted a groundbreaking course for sustainable fisheries. When reauthorized in 2007, the Act gave the eight Regional Fishery Management Councils and NMFS a very clear charge and some new tools to support improved science and management. We are now seeing the results of those tools. As of December 31, 2013, 91 percent of stocks for which we have assessments are not subject to overfishing, and 82 percent are not overfished—both all-time highs. The number of stocks subject to overfishing was highest in 2000, when 48 stocks were on the overfishing list. In 2002, 55 stocks were overfished. Nationally, we have rebuilt 34 stocks since 2000.[5]

We expect the number of stocks on the overfishing list to continue to decrease as a result of management under annual catch limits. Ending overfishing allows stocks to increase in abundance, so we expect to see further declines in the number of overfished stocks and increases in the number of rebuilt stocks.

Flexibility is inherent in the Magnuson-Stevens Act's rebuilding requirements. The Act requires that the period to rebuild a stock not exceed 10 years, but it permits a longer time period in certain cases where the biology of the fish stock, management measures under an international agreement in which the United States participates, or other environmental conditions dictate otherwise, although this period still must be as short as possible. Current rebuilding time periods for stocks with active rebuilding plans range from four years to more than 100 years. Of the 43 active rebuilding plans with a target time to rebuild, 23 of them (53 percent) are set longer than 10 years due to the biology of the stock (slow reproducing, long lived species) or environmental conditions. For example, Pacific yelloweye rockfish has a rebuilding timeline of 71 years. The remaining 20 rebuilding plans are set for 10 years or less. Of the 33 stocks rebuilt since 2000, 18 stocks were rebuilt within 10 years. Two additional stocks in 10-year plans were rebuilt within 12 years.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act provides flexibility to adjust rebuilding plans when a stock is failing to make adequate progress toward rebuilding. In these situations, the Councils can amend the rebuilding plan with revised conservation and management measures. The Act requires that the revised plan be implemented within two years and that it end overfishing (if overfishing is occurring) immediately upon implementation.

Rebuilding plans are also adaptable when new scientific information indicates changing conditions. For example, the target time to rebuild Pacific ocean perch off the Pacific Coast was recently lengthened based on information within a new stock assessment. The assessment, conducted in 2011, revised our understanding of the Pacific ocean perch stock status and productivity and showed that, even in the absence of fishing, the time it would take to rebuild the stock would be longer than the previously established target time to rebuild. Given this information, NMFS worked with the Pacific Fishery Management Council in 2012 to modify the rebuilding plan and extend the target time for stock

[5] These statistics were compiled from the quarterly stock status reports at: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/statusoffisheries/SOSmain.htm

rebuilding from 2017 to 2020.

Rebuilding timelines can also be shortened based on new information. As one example, the original rebuilding plan for cowcod, a Pacific Coast groundfish, was 95 years. The rebuilding time has been modified based on updated scientific information, and is currently 67 years.

Rebuilding fisheries brings significant biological, economic, and social benefits, but doing so takes time, persistence, sacrifice, and adherence to scientific information. Of 26 rebuilt stocks for which information is available, half of them now produce at least 50 percent more revenue than they did when they were overfished. Seven stocks have current revenue levels that are more than 100 percent higher than the lowest revenue point when the stock was overfished.

Atlantic sea scallops provide one example of rebuilding success. In the early 1990s, the abundance of Atlantic sea scallops was near record lows and the fishing mortality rate was at a record high. Fishery managers implemented a number of measures to allow the stock to recover, including an innovative area management system. The stock was declared rebuilt in 2001. In real terms, revenues increased six-fold as the fishery rebuilt, from $44 million in 1998 to $389 million in 2012, making New Bedford the Nation's top port by value of landings since 2000.

Another example of rebuilding success can be seen with Bering Sea snow crab. In 1999, scientists found that Bering Sea snow crab was overfished. In response, managers reduced harvests to a level that would allow the stock to rebuild, and the stock was declared rebuilt in 2011. In the 2011-2012 fishing year, managers were able to increase the harvest limit by 56 percent to nearly 66 million pounds. By 2012, revenue from the fishery had increased to almost 400 percent of the 2006 revenue (the low point during the rebuilding period).

Benefits of Annual Catch Limits

One of the most significant management provisions of the 2007 reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act was the mandate to implement annual catch limits, including measures to ensure accountability and to end and prevent overfishing in federally managed fisheries by 2011 (an annual catch limit is an amount of fish that can be caught in a year such that overfishing does not occur; accountability measures are management controls to prevent annual catch limits from being exceeded, and to correct or mitigate overages of the limits if they occur). This is an important move away from a management system that could only be corrected by going back through the full Council process in order to amend Fishery Management Plans – often taking years to accomplish, all while overfishing continued.

Now, when developing a fishery management plan or amendment, the Councils must consider, in advance, the actions that will occur if a fishery does not meet its performance objectives. As of December 31, 2013, overfishing had ended for 71 percent of the 38 domestic U.S. stocks that were subject to overfishing in 2007 when the Magnuson-Stevens Act was reauthorized.[6]

Ending overfishing is the first step in rebuilding. Prior to the implementation of annual catch limits, a

[6] See Fish Stock Sustainability Index. This report was the source for the underlying data, but the numbers presented here were compiled specifically for this hearing. The report is available at:
http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/statusoffisheries/2012/fourth/Q4%202012%20FSSI%20Summary%20Changes.pdf

number of rebuilding plans experienced difficulty in ending overfishing and achieving the fishing mortality rate called for in the plan. As a result, rebuilding was delayed. Conversely, stocks where overfishing has ended quickly have seen their stock size increase and rebuild more quickly. For example, Widow rockfish in the Pacific was declared overfished in 2001. Fishing mortality on Widow rockfish was immediately substantially reduced resulting in a corresponding increase in stock size. The stock was declared rebuilt in 2011, ahead of the rebuilding deadline.

Most major reductions in allowable catch experienced by fishermen when stocks enter rebuilding plans are predominantly from the requirement to prevent overfishing – which is now required through annual catch limits for all stocks, not just those determined to be overfished. When unsustainably large catches have occurred due to high levels of overfishing on a depleted stock, large reductions in catch will be needed to end overfishing, and the stock must rebuild in abundance before catches will increase.

Because ending overfishing is essential to rebuilding, annual catch limits are a powerful tool to address prior problems in achieving rebuilding. Nine of the 20 stocks currently in 10-year (or less) rebuilding plans had failed to end overfishing as of their last stock assessment. Annual catch limits, which are now in place as a mechanism to control catch to the level specified in the rebuilding plan, are working and we anticipate the next stock assessments for these species to confirm that overfishing has ended. With that result, we will begin to see stronger rebuilding for these stocks. In addition, preliminary data show that annual catch limits have been effective in limiting catch and preventing overfishing for the majority of stocks. Fisheries have successfully stayed within their annual catch limit for over 90 percent of the stocks for which we have catch data.

Ensuring Transparency and Stakeholder Engagement

The Magnuson-Stevens Act created broad goals for U.S. fisheries management and a unique, highly participatory management structure centered on the Councils. This structure ensures that input and decisions about how to manage U.S. fisheries develop through a "bottom up" process that includes fishermen, other fishery stakeholders, affected states, tribal governments, and the Federal Government. By working together with the Councils, states, tribes, and fishermen—under the standards set in the Magnuson-Stevens Act—we have made great strides in ending overfishing, rebuilding stocks, and building a sustainable future for our fishing-dependent communities.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act guides fisheries conservation and management through 10 National Standards. These standards, which have their roots in the original 1976 Act, provide a yardstick against which all fishery management plans and actions developed by the Councils are measured. National Standard 1 requires that conservation and management measures prevent overfishing while achieving, on a continuing basis, the optimum yield from each fishery, which is the average amount of harvest that will provide the greatest overall ecological, economic, and social benefits to the Nation, particularly by providing seafood and recreational opportunities while affording protection to marine ecosystems.

The Councils can choose from a variety of approaches and tools to manage fish stocks to meet this mandate—e.g., catch shares, area closures, and gear restrictions—and, when necessary, also determine how to allocate fish among user groups. These measures are submitted to the U.S. Secretary of Commerce for approval and are implemented by NMFS. Thus, the Councils, in developing their plans, must carefully balance the need for stable fishing jobs, ecological conservation, and societal interests to create holistically sustainable fisheries. A key aspect of this effort is to ensure that overfishing is

prevented, and if it occurs, to end it quickly and rebuild any stock that becomes overfished. Other National Standards mandate that conservation and management measures be based upon the best scientific information available, not discriminate between residents of different states, take into account variations in fisheries and catches, minimize bycatch, and promote the safety of human life at sea.

Effects on fishing communities are central to many Council decisions. Fishing communities rely on fishing-related jobs, as well as the non-commercial and cultural benefits derived from these resources. Marine fisheries are the lifeblood of many coastal communities in the Pacific Islands and West Coast regions and around our Nation. Communities, fishermen, and fishing industries rely not only on today's catch, but also on the predictability of future catches. The need to provide stable domestic fishing and processing jobs is paramount to fulfilling one of the Magnuson-Stevens Act's goals—to provide the Nation with sources of domestic seafood. This objective has even greater purpose now than when the Act was passed, as today U.S. consumers are seeking—more than ever—options for healthy, safe, sustainable, and local seafood. Under the standards set in the Magnuson-Stevens Act—and together with the Councils, states, tribes, territories, and fishermen—we have made great strides in maintaining more stocks at biologically sustainable levels, ending overfishing, rebuilding overfished stocks, building a sustainable future for our fishing-dependent communities, and providing more domestic options for U.S. seafood consumers in a market dominated by imports. Thanks in large part to the strengthened Magnuson-Stevens Act and the sacrifices and investment in conservation by fishing communities across the country, the condition of many of our most economically important fish stocks has improved steadily over the past decade.

Limited Access Privilege Programs (LAPPs)
The Magnuson-Stevens Act authorizes the use of LAPPs, which dedicate a secure share of fish to fishermen for their exclusive use via a Federal permit. NMFS has implemented LAPPs in multiple fisheries nationwide and additional programs are under development.

While limited access privilege programs are just one of many management options the Councils can consider, they have proven to be effective in meeting a number of management objectives when they have broad stakeholder support. Both in the United States and abroad, such programs are helping to achieve annual catch limits, reduce the cost of producing seafood, extend fishing seasons, increase revenues, and improve fishermen's safety.

For example, NMFS has three LAPPs in the Southeast Region, including a South Atlantic commercial wreckfish individual transferable quota program implemented in 1992, a Gulf of Mexico commercial red snapper individual fishing quota program implemented in 2007, and a Gulf of Mexico commercial grouper and tilefish individual fishing quota program implemented in 2010. While the grouper and tilefish program is too young to fully evaluate, recent reviews of the wreckfish and red snapper programs demonstrate they are working as intended. The wreckfish program eliminated excess fleet capacity and the race to catch fish and reduced gear and fishing area conflicts. The red snapper program is better aligning the capacity of the fleet with the commercial catch limit, mitigating short fishing seasons, improving safety at sea and increasing the profitability of the fishery. Individual fishing quota participants are targeting red snapper year round, compared to an average of 121 day seasons prior to implementation of the LAPP. And the average ex-vessel price of red snapper in 2012 was 27 percent greater than the average inflation adjusted ex-vessel price in 2007.

In the West Coast Region, the groundfish trawl catch share program has been remarkably successful in its first 2 years of implementation. Results from 2012 indicate a substantial reduction in bycatch, with fishermen catching more of their targeted species and fewer species that should be avoided. Because fishermen have more flexibility under a catch share program, they can be more selective in the areas they target. To catch fish in better condition and sell them at a higher price, fishermen are shifting their tactics. For example, trawl fishermen increased their use of fixed gear (i.e., fixed pots that rest on the sea floor or baited hooks on miles-long lines) the first 2 years of the program. Additionally, in 2012, 58 percent of sablefish revenue in the catch shares program was from fixed gear, up from 48 percent in 2011. The number of quota transfers in 2012—a good indicator of how fishermen are fine-tuning their quota holdings to better reflect their fishing plans—was double that of 2011. The total pounds of such vessel-to-vessel transfers in 2012 was 25 percent above 2011 and suggests that participants are planning earlier and becoming more comfortable with the individual fishing quota management system. This strong partnership will carry the West Coast Groundfish Catch Shares Program toward the common goal of healthy, sustainable fisheries and fishing communities. NMFS is hopeful that the increased planning and knowledge about the fishery will lead to the continued success of the program.

Improvements to Science and Recreational Fishing Data

Without high-quality fishery science, we cannot be confident the Nation is attaining optimum yield from its fisheries, or that we're preventing overfishing and harm to ecosystems and fishing communities. Attaining optimum yield requires investing in information about fish stocks, marine habitats, and ecosystems and the individuals and groups that rely upon fishing. NMFS is committed to generating the best fishery science—biological, ecological, and socioeconomic—to support the goals of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. To achieve the goals of the Act, we are conducting the research and analyses necessary to understand the environmental and habitat factors affecting the sustainability of fish populations. We must continue to increase what we know about our fish stocks in order to reduce uncertainty and avoid potentially reduced annual catch limits, resulting in lost economic opportunities.

The importance of increasing the frequency of stock assessments, improving the quality of fisheries science with a better understanding of ecosystem factors, investing in cooperative research and electronic monitoring technology, and enhancing our engagement with fishermen cannot be stressed enough. Partnerships with industry and academia are a key component of successful fisheries management. Cooperative research provides a means for commercial and recreational fishermen to become involved in the science and data collection needed to improve assessments, and develop and support successful fishery management measures.

With regard to electronic monitoring, the agency recently implemented a National policy to encourage the consideration of electronic technologies to complement and/or improve existing fishery-dependent data collection programs to achieve the most cost-effective and sustainable approach that ensures alignment of management goals, data needs, funding sources and regulations. In consultation with the Councils and subject matter experts, we will assemble guidance and best practices for use by Regional Offices, Councils and stakeholders when they consider electronic technology options. Implementation of electronic technologies in a fishery-dependent data collection program is subject to the Magnuson-Stevens Act and Council regulatory process and other relevant state and federal regulations.

In the Southeast, the SouthEast Data, Assessment, and Review (SEDAR) is a cooperative process initiated in 2002 to improve the quality and reliability of Southeast Region stock assessments, and to

increase stakeholder participation in the process. SEDAR is managed by the Caribbean, Gulf of Mexico, and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils in coordination with NMFS and the Atlantic and Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commissions. SEDAR emphasizes stakeholder participation in assessment development, transparency in the assessment process, and a rigorous and independent scientific review of completed stock assessments. The Territorial Fisheries Science Initiative in the Pacific Islands and Caribbean is an effort to overcome the lack of data collection capacity in the U.S. territories that has resulted in a paucity of scientific information to guide management actions. The small size of the territory governments with their modest budgets; the relatively low commercial value of the diverse and small-scale fisheries; and the limited NMFS presence in the territories have all contributed to the current shortcomings. This initiative also is intended to address these shortcomings and improve the quality and reliability of Pacific Islands Region stock assessments and increase stakeholder participation in the process.

The Magnuson-Stevens Act required improvements to recreational fisheries data collected by NMFS for use in management decisions. In October 2008, NMFS established the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP), a new program to improve recreational fishery data collection efforts, consistent with the Magnuson-Stevens Act requirement and the 2006 recommendations of the National Research Council. MRIP is a national system of coordinated regional data collection programs designed to address specific needs for improved recreational fishing information. One major component of this program is the development of a national registry of anglers which NMFS has been using in a series of pilot studies to test more efficient mail and telephone surveys for the collection of data on recreational fishing activity. Based on the results of these studies, NMFS expects to be ready to implement new registry-based survey designs in 2015.

MRIP is also developing and implementing numerous other survey improvements to address the National Research Council's recommendations, including improvements in estimation methodologies, shoreside survey design, and for-hire fishery data collections.

Improved fisheries science also relies on data collected by fisheries observers as well as collaborative research with non-government partners. Adequate observer coverage also is critical for improving our bycatch data, and the biological samples collected by observers are used in stock assessments and life history studies. National Standard 9 requires fishery management plans to take into account the impact of the fishery on bycatch, particularly for protected species. NMFS continues to work with the Councils and through take reduction teams established under the Marine Mammal Protection Act to identify measures that can be taken to minimize serious injury and mortality to sea turtles, corals, dolphins and other marine mammals throughout the nation's oceans.

Successes and Challenges

There are many examples of what fishermen, scientists, and managers can do by working together to bring back a resource that once was in trouble. In the Pacific Islands Region, NMFS, the Western Pacific Fishery Management Council, the State of Hawaii, and fishing communities have ended overfishing of the Hawaiian archipelago's deep-water bottomfish complex—a culturally significant grouping of seven species of snapper and grouper. This has enabled NMFS to increase annual catch limits for these stocks for both commercial and recreational fishermen and ensure these fish are available year-round.

On the West Coast, NMFS and the Pacific Fishery Management Council, the fishing industry,

recreational anglers, and other partners have successfully rebuilt a number of once overfished stocks, including coho salmon, lingcod, Pacific whiting, and widow rockfish. These and other conservation gains, including implementation of the West Coast groundfish trawl rationalization program, enabled NMFS to increase catch limits for abundant West Coast groundfish species that co-occur with groundfish species in rebuilding plans.

In the Southeast Region, NOAA, the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, the fishing industries, recreational anglers and other partners have successfully rebuilt a number of once overfished stocks, including red grouper and king mackerel in the Gulf of Mexico, black sea bass in the South Atlantic, and yellowtail snapper, which is shared by both the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic regions. These and other conservation gains enabled NMFS to increase catch limits for six stocks or stock complexes and eliminate or reduce two fixed seasonal closures over the last year. The additional harvest opportunities attributed to rebuilding the South Atlantic black sea bass stock alone have increased annual consumer surplus for recreational anglers, annual ex-vessel revenues for commercial fishermen and annual profits for for-hire vessels by about $13 million, $1 million and $350,000, respectively.[7]

The Atlantic sea scallop resource in New England was rebuilt after fishermen partnered with academic and NOAA scientists to learn more about scallop abundance and distribution, and then embraced a rotational management approach focused on long-term sustainability. Valued at approximately $389 million dollars in 2012, the scallop fishery has made New Bedford, MA, the top revenue port in the U.S. In fact, many fisheries in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic are a significant part of the national success story. Of the 32 stocks rebuilt nationally since 2000, 18, more than half, were rebuilt by NOAA, the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils, the fishing industries, recreational anglers, and other partners on the Atlantic coast. In addition to Atlantic sea scallops, these include other important stocks such as summer flounder and Atlantic swordfish.

But meeting mandates to prevent and end overfishing and implement annual catch limits can be very challenging where data is scarce, which is the case for many of the stocks in the Pacific Islands region and the Caribbean, particularly those species being fished in the coral reef ecosystem. The agency has begun the process of reviewing the National Standard 1 guidelines, which were modified in 2009 to focus on implementing the requirement for annual catch limits. This was a major change in how many fisheries were managed, and we want to ensure the guidance we have in place reflects current thinking on the most effective way to meet the objectives of National Standard 1, building on what we and the Councils have learned. A May 2012 Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking was followed by an almost 6-month public comment period where we asked for input on 11 topics addressed in the guidelines. We received a significant amount of input, and are in the process of working through the comments and developing options for moving forward, be it through additional technical guidelines, regulatory changes, and/or identifying issues for discussion as part of a reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

We also face formidable challenges managing recovering stocks to benefit both commercial and recreational user groups with fundamentally different goals and objectives. This is perhaps most evident in the Gulf of Mexico red snapper fishery. Rebuilding measures put in place in 2007 are working. That

[7] SAFMC (South Atlantic Fishery Management Council). 2013. Regulatory Amendment 19 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Snapper Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region. South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 4055 Faber Place, Ste 201, North Charleston, S.C. 29405.

stock is rapidly recovering and now supports the largest combined commercial and recreational catch quota ever specified for this stock. Commercial individual fishing quota program participants directly benefit from stock recovery by receiving additional pounds of quota that can be fished more efficiently as catch rates and fish size increase over time. But recreational fishermen who simply desire the opportunity to fish are seeing that opportunity progressively restricted as the stock recovers because they are able to reach their quota in fewer and fewer days. A lasting red snapper management strategy will require broad agreement, equitable application and management support at both state and federal levels.

Currently, all Gulf Coast states have expressed support for moving to a regional red snapper management strategy which could provide greater flexibility in tailoring the recreational fishing season, bag limit and minimum size limit to meet constituent needs. The Gulf Council is working toward implementing such a regime in the recreational fishery for the 2015 fishing year. NMFS fully supports this and any other management option that has broad stakeholder support and provides the fishery greater stability, while meeting conservation objectives.

Looking to the Future

Remaining Challenges
Amid these successes, challenges remain. It is critical that we maintain progress toward meeting the mandate of the Magnuson-Stevens Act to end overfishing and rebuild overfished stocks. Annual catch limits have been an effective tool in improving the sustainability of fisheries around the Nation, but managing fisheries using annual catch limits and accountability measures was a major change for some fisheries, and the initial implementation has identified some areas where we can improve that process. We will continue to work with the Councils to achieve the best possible alignment of science and management for each fishery to attain the goals of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. We will continue to develop our science and management tools, improve our stock assessments and monitoring efforts, and create more effective annual catch limits and accountability measures. In so doing, we must continue to ensure solid, science-based determinations of stock status and better linkages to biological, socioeconomic, and ecosystem conditions.

We value the important partnerships we have formed with the states, territories, tribes, fishermen, and other interest groups in helping address these challenges. These partnerships are critical to developing successful management strategies. Together with our partners, we continue to explore alternative and innovative approaches that will produce the best available information to incorporate into management.

It is also increasingly important that we better understand ecosystem and habitat factors, such as the effects of climate change, interannual and interdecadal climate shifts, ocean acidification, and other environmental regime shifts and natural disasters, and incorporate this information into our stock assessments and management decisions. Resilient ecosystems and habitat form the foundation for robust fisheries and fishing jobs. The Magnuson-Stevens Act currently provides flexibility for bringing ecosystem considerations into fisheries management. This flexibility in the Magnuson-Stevens Act is one of the Act's strengths, allowing us to meet our responsibilities under the Act in concert with related legislation, such as the Marine Mammal Protection Act and the Endangered Species Act, to reduce bycatch of protected species to mandated levels. The alignment of measures to conserve habitat and protected species with measures to end overfishing and rebuild and manage fish stocks will be a key component of NOAA's success in implementing ecosystem-based fisheries management.

NOAA supports the collaborative and transparent process embodied in the Councils, as authorized in the Magnuson-Stevens Act, and strongly believes that all viable management tools should continue to be available as options for the Councils to consider when developing management programs.

The Next Reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act
With some of the largest and most successful fisheries in the world, the United States has become a global model of responsible fisheries management. This success is due to strong partnerships among the commercial and recreational fishing, conservation, and science and management communities. Continued collaboration is necessary to address the ongoing challenges of maintaining productive and sustainable fisheries.

The *Managing Our Nation's Fisheries 3* conference—co-sponsored by the eight Councils and NMFS—brought together a broad spectrum of partners and interests to discuss current and developing concepts addressing the sustainability of U.S. marine fisheries and their management. The conference was developed around three themes: (1) improving fishery management essentials, (2) advancing ecosystem-based decision-making, and (3) providing for fishing community sustainability.

We were excited to see a wide range of stakeholders represent many points of view, from commercial and recreational fishermen, to conservation and science and management organizations, to indigenous communities. Before the last reauthorization, we co-sponsored two of these conferences, and they played an important role in bringing people together and creating an opportunity to present ideas and understand different perspectives. We expect the ideas that emerged from this event to inform potential legislative changes to the Magnuson-Stevens Act, but the benefits are much greater than that. The communication across regions and Councils provided an opportunity to share best practices and lessons learned, and could also inform changes to current policy or regulations that can be accomplished without statutory changes.

Conclusion

Because of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the United States is sustainably and responsibly managing U.S. fisheries, to ensure that stocks are maintained at healthy levels, fishing is conducted in a way that minimizes impacts on the marine ecosystem, and fishing communities' needs are considered in management decisions. Fisheries harvested in the United States are scientifically monitored, regionally managed, and enforced under 10 National Standards of sustainability. But we did not get here overnight. Under the Magnuson-Stevens Act, our Nation's journey toward sustainable fisheries has evolved over the course of 38 years.

In 2007, Congress gave NOAA and the Councils a clear mandate, new authority, and new tools to achieve the goal of sustainable fisheries within measurable timeframes. Notable among these were the requirements for annual catch limits and accountability measures to prevent, respond to, and end overfishing—real game changers in our national journey toward sustainable fisheries that are rapidly delivering results.

This progress has been made possible by the collaborative involvement of our U.S. commercial and recreational fishing fleets and their commitment to science-based management, improving gear-

technologies, and application of best stewardship practices. We have established strong partnerships with states, tribes, Councils, and fishing industries. By working together through the highly participatory process established in the Magnuson-Stevens Act, we will continue to address management challenges in a changing environment.

To understand where we are, it is important to reflect on where we've been. We have made great progress but our achievements have not come easily, nor will they be sustained without continued attention. This is a critical time in the history of federal fisheries management, and we must move forward in a thoughtful and disciplined way to ensure our Nation's fisheries are able to meet the needs of both current and future generations. We will take the recommendations from the *Managing Our Nation's Fisheries 3* conference, and look to the future in a holistic, comprehensive way that considers the needs of the fish, fishermen, ecosystems and communities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss implementation progress of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. We are available to answer any questions you may have.