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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**

HEARING ON

**“WEST COAST AND WESTERN PACIFIC PERSPECTIVES ON MAGNUSON-STEVENSON
ACT REAUTHORIZATION”**

**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OCEANS, ATMOSPHERE, FISHERIES, AND COAST GUARD
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION**

UNITED STATES SENATE

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Introduction

Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. This testimony is being provided by Michael Tosatto and Will Stelle, the Pacific Islands and West Coast Regional Administrators for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). 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 and salmon, groundfish, sardine, and albacore in the Pacific off the U.S. west coast—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 driver of local and regional economies, as well as a major contributor to the national economy. Subsistence fishing provides an essential food source and is culturally significant for the indigenous peoples in the Pacific Islands. In addition, for many Tribes on the West Coast, their usual and accustomed fishing and harvesting activities of marine (and other natural)

resources are guaranteed by Treaties with the United States. The co-management responsibilities required by these Treaties has effectuated an important additional facet to the management of marine resources under the Magnuson Act and other authorities and permeates the governance of marine resources on the west coast of the United States.

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

U.S. fisheries are producing sustainable U.S. seafood. The Federal fishery management system is effectively and responsibly managing fish stocks at biologically sustainable levels, and in cases where some stocks have become overfished, the system has been effective at rebuilding populations to healthy target levels. 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.

The advancement of our science and management tools has resulted in improved sustainability of fisheries and greater stability for industry. Since passage in 1976, the Magnuson-Stevens Act has charted a groundbreaking course toward sustainable U.S. fisheries. The 2007 reauthorization gave the eight Regional Fishery Management Councils (Councils) and NMFS a very clear charge and new tools to support improved science and management. Key requirements 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

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.

biological sustainability.

In some cases, as with the Hawaii longline fishery for the highly migratory species of bigeye tuna, such an investment is made in a broad international management context. Despite many years of reduced fishing levels, it has not yet produced the expected conservation benefits on a basin-wide scale. We need to continue to address management challenges such as this in the international arena and explore new opportunities in a holistic, deliberative, and thoughtful way that includes input from the wide range of stakeholders who care deeply about these issues.

Fortunately, overfishing has, for the most part, been successfully prevented on the West Coast. For the handful of overfished stocks that existed, some already have rebuilt and the rebuilding progress continues on others. Strait of Juan de Fuca coho salmon was declared rebuilt in 2012. Petrale sole is projected to be rebuilt in 2015. In the U.S. West Coast groundfish fishery, we are starting to see some return on our conservation investments. As the overfished stocks that were restricting the fishery have rebuilt, overall catch levels have been rising, providing safe domestic seafood, more fishing opportunities, and jobs. These results lead us to conclude that the Magnuson-Stevens Act's call for close collaboration among NMFS, the Pacific Council, and all of our stakeholders is one of its greatest strengths and has been essential to the success of West Coast fisheries.

Our 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.

Implementing the Magnuson-Stevens Act

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.

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. Optimum yield 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.

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.

We all share the common goal of healthy fisheries that can be sustained for future generations. Without clear rules based on science, fair enforcement, and a shared commitment to sustainable management, short-term pressures can easily undermine the social, economic, and environmental benefits that come from sustainably and responsibly managed fisheries. Though overfished stocks remain a challenge in some fisheries, as their populations grow and catch limits increase, we are beginning to see benefits to those resources, the industries they support, and the economy.

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 provisions of this legislation.

Ending Overfishing, Implementing Annual Catch Limits, and Rebuilding

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). Now, when developing a fishery management plan or amendment, the Councils must consider the actions that will occur if a fishery does not meet its performance objectives. As of December 31, 2013, assessments demonstrated that overfishing 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.⁵ Annual catch limits designed to prevent overfishing are in place for all stocks, and we

⁵ See Fish Stock Sustainability Index. This report was the source for the underlying data, but the numbers presented here were

expect additional stocks to come off the overfishing list as stock assessments are updated in the coming years. The Magnuson-Stevens Act also includes requirements to rebuild any overfished fishery to the level that can support the maximum sustainable yield, and we have rebuilt 34 stocks nationally since 2000.⁶

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. NMFS also worked collaboratively with the Pacific Council to develop an abundance-based harvest management framework for Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed Lower Columbia River Chinook. Ocean salmon fisheries are severely constrained to meet conservation objectives for Lower Columbia River Chinook and other ESA-listed salmon, but there is flexibility in how fisheries are managed to meet specific risk criteria. Not only was the Pacific Council's input critical to our decisions regarding how to manage risk and optimize fishery objectives, it helped integrate our process under the ESA with that of the Magnuson-Stevens Act under full "sunshine" so that all could follow that complex process.

But meeting mandates to prevent and end overfishing and implement annual catch limits can be very challenging where data are scarce, which is the case for many of the stocks in the Pacific Islands region, 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.

Improvements to Science and Recreational Fishing Data

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>

⁶ See Fish Stock Sustainability Index. Available at:

http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/statusoffisheries/2012/fourth/MapRebuiltStocksCY_Q4_2012.pdf

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 must conduct 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, and enhancing our engagement with fishermen cannot be stressed enough. The Territorial Fisheries Science Initiative 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) 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 that, in the West Coast Region, relies on data from state-issued fishing licenses. This registry is being used 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. On the West Coast, the states have taken the lead following the National Research Council's recommendations to improve on the Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistics Survey by fielding their own surveys through cooperation with NMFS and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission. Since 2010, California has been using the Automated Licensing Data System to issue and record all fishing licenses and to include those anglers in the national registry of anglers. A variety of survey methods have been used to estimate catch and effort for salmon and non-salmon fisheries in Oregon and Washington, including the Oregon Recreational Boat Survey, Shore and Estuary Boat Survey, and Washington Ocean Sampling Program. These surveys along with angler telephone surveys, commercial passenger fishing vessel logbooks, and telephone surveys are used to estimate recreational catch and effort on the West Coast. MRIP funding has been used to look for ways to adequately sample pulse fisheries such as the thresher shark fishery in Southern California. There has also been a focus on improving accessibility to the data held in the Recreational Fisheries Information Network.

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 minimize bycatch. In the Pacific, NMFS continues to work with the Councils, industry, academia, and other partners to conduct research and test new methods and gear that will make our U.S. fisheries in the Pacific even cleaner, more selective, and able to avoid interactions with marine mammals and sea turtles. Much of this is done through the Magnuson-Stevens Act's Cooperative Research Program, Bycatch Reduction Engineering Program, and the experimental fishing permits process. For example, in the recreational West Coast thresher shark fishery, biologists from the NMFS Southwest Fisheries Science Center, West Coast Region, and the Pflieger Institute of Environmental Research collaborated to find out how to improve the survival of released thresher sharks. They found that the use of circle hooks rather than J-hooks greatly increases a shark's chances of survival after release, and these findings have been published and widely disseminated to anglers in southern California through presentations at fishing clubs and shows, along with the production of a best practices video posted on the NMFS website. In addition, NMFS has routinely worked through take reduction teams established under the Marine Mammal Protection Act to successfully identify measures to minimize bycatch and other impacts on sea turtles, cetaceans, and other protected species in the Pacific.

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.

NMFS has two LAPPs in the West Coast Region: the groundfish trawl catch share program implemented in 2011 and the sablefish fixed gear "permit stacking" program started in 2001. 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 fish and how they target species. 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. 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.

Looking to the Future

Remaining Challenges

Amid these successes, challenges remain. The Pacific Islands Region has made progress to end overfishing, but we face challenges when managing the numerous highly migratory stocks in the international arena, where other nations have fundamentally different goals and objectives. This is perhaps most evident in the Western and Central Pacific Fisheries Commission tropical tuna fisheries. Negotiated conservation and management measures were first put in place in 2008, but with poor compliance and other accommodations for the small island developing states, it is clear that not all of these measures are working. A long-term management strategy will require broad agreement, equitable application, and full membership compliance.

On the West Coast, although we have made great strides in creating biologically and ecologically sustainable fisheries, there are challenges with the economic sustainability of the fisheries. Many involve significant policy considerations about the future of coastal communities, international conservation commitments and trade, and, of course, budgets—not just federal, but state and tribal as well.

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 doing so, we must continue to ensure solid, science-based determinations of stock status and better linkages to biological, socioeconomic, and ecosystem conditions.

A primary goal in the Pacific Islands Region is to bring more data to the table and ensure the fishery management response to annual catch trends is appropriate. Many fish stocks in the Pacific Islands are managed in mixed stock complexes to make the best use of scarce data. The majority of fisheries in the Pacific Islands Region are extremely data limited, making it challenging to manage and monitor annual catch limits in the way Congress envisioned. These small-scale commercial, non-commercial, and subsistence fisheries are nonetheless critically important to the island communities. Looking ahead, we must continue to improve the quality and quantity of scientific data, continue progress made on stock assessment improvement plans, and continue to explore new and innovative management tools to achieve more biologically and economically sustainable fishery resources.

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. In 2005, NMFS worked in a public/private partnership with commercial fishermen, The Nature

Conservancy, and the Pacific Fishery Management Council to reduce trawl effort and protect habitat off Morro Bay in California. The Nature Conservancy conducted a private buy-out of trawl permits that was complemented by protections for 3.8 million acres of essential fish habitat under the Magnuson-Stevens Act. The partnership continues today as NMFS and the Pacific Council provide regulatory support for Morro Bay fishermen and The Nature Conservancy in their development of local markets and management strategies so that the permits are utilized in the sustainable and long-term best interest of the community. On the West Coast, the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission has long been a key partner for us in managing West Coast fisheries. Recently, the Commission has been working with West Coast groundfish fishermen to install cameras on trawl vessels to test whether these and other electronic monitoring technologies can provide the same level of data quality currently provided by observers, at a lower cost.

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. For NOAA and the Pacific Council, this flexibility allowed us to develop a non-regulatory Fishery Ecosystem Plan on the West Coast, completed in 2013. Under the organizing principles of the Fishery Ecosystem Plan, the Pacific Council is exploring measures to restrict the future development of new fisheries for forage fish species. If appropriate, forage fish protection measures would be implemented under the authorities of existing fishery management plans. 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 has made great progress toward 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 consistent with 10 National Standards for fishery conservation and management. But we did not get here overnight. 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. We look forward to these discussions.

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.