

PACIFIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

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Testimony of Mr. Jim Lone, Chairman
Pacific Fishery Management Council
to
Subcommittee on Oceans and Fisheries
of the
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Seattle, Washington
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Madame Chairman and committee members:

My name is Jim Lone. I chair the Pacific Fishery Management Council (Pacific Council). Thank you for this opportunity to offer comments related to implementation of the 1996 Sustainable Fisheries Act (SFA) and the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act).

This is a challenging time for fishery management on the West Coast. Several important salmon and groundfish stocks are depressed or overfished and our fishing industry is severely overcapitalized. Recently, this Council sent letters to the governors of the three West Coast states, warning them of a potential disaster in the groundfish fishing industry. Many small fishing businesses are in danger of failing this year, or in the near future. It is likely the crisis comes from the combined effects of a change in the ocean environment, inadequate scientific data collection and analysis, and a national policy that encouraged capital infusion into the fishing industry.

On July 29, 1999, you received the joint recommendations of the eight regional councils for the reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act as an attachment to the testimony of Mr. Richard Lauber, Chairman of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council.^{1/} The Pacific Council fully endorses those recommendations. In particular, we want to emphasize our support of the recommendations to rescind the moratorium on individual fishing quotas and provide discretionary authority to establish fees for observer programs. The rest of my comments will be specific to the management experience and recommendations of the Pacific Council.

1/ The collective recommendations were presented on July 22, 1999 to the House Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife, and Oceans by Mr. Joseph Brancaleone, Chairman of the New England Fishery Management Council.

The Pacific Council has fishery management plans (FMP) for three fisheries—groundfish, salmon, and coastal pelagic species (CPS; e.g., anchovy, sardines, and mackerel). Work is progressing on development of a fourth plan for highly migratory species (tunas and billfish). The Pacific Council and National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) have completed and implemented amendments to the groundfish and coastal pelagic species FMPs to meet the requirements of the SFA.^{2/} Amendments to the salmon FMP were delayed due to an existing commitment to update the entire salmon FMP and its environmental impact statement. The Council approved the salmon plan amendments in March 1999 and they should be implemented this year.

Groundfish

Overcapitalization is the single most important issue challenging the West Coast fishing industry and this Council. For years, national policy encouraged industry growth and development as we “Americanized” the groundfish fishery. We didn’t recognize quickly enough that we had achieved that goal. The Pacific Council took steps to stem the tide by establishing a groundfish license limitation program that took effect in 1994. We also took steps toward better management of the sablefish fishery by developing an individual fishing quota (IFQ) program. We delayed action on the IFQ program in response to strong signals from Congress. With the 1996 reauthorization, we lost the ability to implement an IFQ program. We strongly support an end to the moratorium on IFQs. We believe we need this management tool as a means to stabilize the industry and rebuild stocks.

On the West Coast, we are now facing the results of years of inadequate funding for research and data collection. There is widespread concern about the quality and quantity of scientific information on current stock conditions. The decisions we make based on this information are vigorously questioned. Some believe on-the-water observations by fishermen indicate the Pacific Council’s harvest restrictions are not justified. Others believe the Council should be even more restrictive until the science supports greater exploitation. We are also required to assess the social and economic impacts of management on the fishing industry and communities, yet we are not provided adequate funds. We are required to reduce bycatch, yet we have no funds for an observer program

2/ The section on bycatch in the groundfish FMP, and the sections on bycatch and maximum sustainable yield for squid in the coastal pelagic FMP were not approved and are being modified by the Council at this time.

3/ The following three letters are appended to this testimony to document recent and future Council funding needs:

to collect bycatch data. I have appended three letters to my testimony which document the funding issue in more detail.^{3/}

Regarding future reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, it is our opinion that if NMFS and the councils cannot conduct the basic stock assessments and collect the necessary fishery information, the system won't be able to make good management decisions regardless of how the law is constituted. Simply put, we cannot do the job you want us to do, and the job we want to do, without the necessary resources.

In line with our need for more and better information, the Council needs discretionary authority to establish fees to help fund observer programs. This authority would be the same as granted to the North Pacific Council under Section 313 of the Magnuson-Stevens Act. In the long term, the fishing industry may be able to shoulder more of the costs to reduce overcapitalization and monitor the catch. In the short term, however, our industry cannot afford these additional burdens.

Salmon

The SFA required little substantive change in the way we manage salmon. Over the last several years, many coho and some chinook salmon stocks have been at chronic low levels and several have been listed under the Endangered Species Act. However, for the most part, the management of salmon under the current FMP already met the more conservative definition of optimum yield contained in the SFA. The ongoing low stock levels are currently much more the result of long-standing and continued degradation of freshwater habitat and unfavorable marine survival than of any continuing impacts of fisheries. Despite some draconian fishery reductions by the Council beginning in the early 1990s, little or no recovery is evident for most of the salmon stocks listed as overfished. The numerous variables affecting abundance make it impossible to specify a time period in which an overfished salmon stock will be rebuilt.

The biggest change in salmon management under the SFA has been the inclusion of the description and identification of essential fish habitat and the consultation requirements it

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- (1) Letter of December 22, 1998 from Mr. Lawrence D. Six, Executive Director, Pacific Fishery Management Council, to Dr. William Hogarth and Mr. Will Stelle, NMFS.
 - (2) Letter of December 14, 1999 from Mr. Robert K. Mahood, Executive Director, South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, to Mr. Alan Risenhoover, NMFS.
 - (3) Letter of December 17, 1999 from Mr. Pete Moffitt, Chairman of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council, on behalf of the Regional Council Chairmen, to Ms. Penny Dalton, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries, NMFS.

includes. Since Amendment 14 to the salmon FMP has not yet been implemented, it is not possible to determine the impacts of the essential fish habitat requirements. However, considerable public input during the amendment process indicates opposition among the general business community to the breadth of the essential salmon habitat description. There is a fear of additional permit requirements and delays in land use or development projects. This is especially pertinent for salmon due to the inclusion of thousands of miles of freshwater streams. Conversely, we have received numerous comments deploring the lack of teeth in the essential fish habitat measures to require compliance with NMFS or Council recommendations. The extent of increased workload for the councils and NMFS remains in question. We view the SFA essential fish habitat requirements as a logical, though controversial, step in increasing the recognition of the importance of salmon habitat and ensuring its protection and restoration, which is vital to long-term salmon recovery.

Coastal Pelagic Species

The most significant impact of the SFA on coastal pelagic species (CPS) fisheries was expansion of the FMP. Spurred by requirements of the SFA, increased abundance of Pacific sardine, and high demand for market squid, the Pacific Council greatly expanded the scope and authority of the FMP. Of particular interest in the Pacific Northwest, is the expansion of effort in Pacific sardine fisheries off Oregon and Washington. Favorable oceanic and climatic conditions have caused an increase in both biomass and geographic range of Pacific sardine. In response, fishers and processors have become interested in these new fishing opportunities which may compensate for reductions in groundfish optimum yields by providing opportunity to use idle fishing and processing capacity. There is also potential for increased investment in fishing and processing capacity. With any expansion in capacity, it is likely the Council will have to grapple with an overcapitalized fishery in the future, as sardine abundance will naturally decrease in response to changing oceanic conditions. There is also concern that expanding sardine fisheries in Oregon and Washington could catch significant numbers of Pacific salmon (as bycatch). Preliminary data and information from fishers indicate that incidental catch of salmon is minimal, and the industry is working with the states to develop ways to minimize salmon bycatch and bycatch mortality.

Summary

In summary, Madame Chairperson, the Pacific Council fully supports the intent of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and, with certain exceptions previously noted, has developed workable plan amendments to implement it. Moreover, the Council has begun development of a strategic plan to address the major groundfish issues and to help move the fisheries towards recovery and prosperity. To implement the strategic plan, we will likely need legislation and financial support to help reduce the number of fishing vessels

that harvest fish off the West Coast and to collect the necessary data for competent management. We appreciate the efforts and attention Congress has given to improve and guide our management through the passage of the SFA and in your current efforts to make further beneficial changes in our fishery management. We know that there are many other interests throughout the nation competing for your attention and funding. We hope that our comments to you today have been helpful and will try to be responsive to any other information or input you may need. Thank you again for this opportunity. I will be happy to answer any questions you or the other Senators may have.