

**Testimony of James L. Connaughton  
Chairman, Council on Environmental Quality**

**on**

**Reauthorization of  
the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act  
Before the Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation**

**U.S. Senate**

**November 16, 2005**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. I commend you for your work on this important piece of legislation. The President is committed to providing the American people with healthy fisheries and an economically vibrant fishing industry, a source of both nutritious food and recreational enjoyment. Last week, NOAA announced that seafood consumption in America rose for the third straight year in 2004. As Americans demand more fish and shellfish, we need to become increasingly better at managing our fisheries. The Administration looks forward to working with Congress to ensure the long-term sustainable use of our marine resources. To achieve this

objective, we must rebuild our fish stocks and end overfishing once and for all.

Let me first put this effort into its broader context. At the President's direction, the Administration is working with every level of government and the private sector to advance the next generation of ocean policy. This effort requires more effective management and conservation of our ocean and coastal resources through innovative science, management, and policy initiatives. In 2001, the President and Congress initiated a thorough examination of issues affecting our ocean and coastal waters through the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy chaired by Admiral Watkins. The Commission began work in September 2001, and pursuant to its legislative mandate, completed their report with 212 recommendations in September 2004. President Bush responded to this report three months later, on December 17, 2004, with the release of the U.S. Ocean Action Plan, which incorporates key recommendations of the Commission.

One of our most important priorities under the Action Plan is improved stewardship of our fisheries resources. On September 19, 2005, the President submitted to Congress his vision for the reauthorization of the Magnuson Stevens Act which contains essential elements to implement the President's Ocean Action Plan.

For centuries our national fisheries have been sources of prosperity and abundance. U.S. commercial and recreational fisheries contribute \$60 billion to the economy annually, and they employ more than 500,000 people. The Magnuson-Stevens Act, signed over 30 years ago, has clearly stood the test of time. The creation of a partnership between the federal government and the Regional Fisheries Management Councils is the law's innovation for improved fisheries management. This partnership allows the expertise of scientists, fishermen and other stakeholders at the local level to guide fisheries management. The Administration has proposed reauthorization that will build on this strength and harness the changing landscape of the industry and our expanding scientific capability and knowledge. Commercial and

recreational fisheries serve an important role in our country and our leadership on this issue here at home will provide an important model internationally.

I would like to highlight the most important features of the Administration's proposal, which should be part of any final legislation. Our proposal sets a hard deadline to end overfishing practices within two years. It also incorporates stock life history into rebuilding requirements. We maintain our commitment to balancing conservation and use of fisheries resources and continue to rely on scientists, fisherman and expertise at the local level to guide fisheries management.

Our proposal specifically authorizes the Councils to use dedicated access privilege programs as proven highly effective market-based tools for fisheries management, while ensuring that the Councils have the flexibility to tailor these programs. Under existing dedicated access privilege programs, commercial fishermen have ended the "race-to-fish". As a result, fishermen have benefited from a significantly safer

and more stable industry, decreased harvesting costs, increased product quality, and increased profits. This proven mechanism provides an individual fisherman, cooperative, or community the exclusive privilege to a share of the total catch allowed. It is time that we replicate these successful management systems in other regions. Reauthorization of the Magnuson-Stevens Act is essential to achieving greater use of these proven tools, which harness the power of markets to achieve sustainable, profitable fisheries.

Additionally the NEPA analytical framework provides important benefits to our resource agencies, the Councils, the fishing industry, and the general public. It is essential that we ensure that the NEPA process is more timely and better integrated with the fisheries management plan process to better inform local planning and infrastructure decisions.

The Administration's proposal includes an ecosystem-based approach to assist further ecologically sound resource management decisions. Our proposal establishes broad policy direction and gives

clear authority to the Councils to design ecosystem-based approaches. Because fisheries scientists and managers have advocated ecosystem approaches to fisheries management, NOAA and the Councils have already begun integrating this approach into fisheries management and more can be done.

Working together, we have the opportunity to improve fisheries productivity and benefits for today's fishermen while also ensuring and enhancing our fisheries continued availability for future generations. We look forward to continued work with your Committee to develop a final bill that can best meet the objectives for the vibrant sustainability of our nation's living marine resources. Thank you, Mr. Chairman for the opportunity to address your Committee today. I would be happy to answer questions.