

Comments on Reauthorization of the Magnuson Stevens Fishery Management and Conservation Act

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Definitions:

The terms “overfished” and “overfishing” are used extensively throughout the Magnuson-Stevens Act. These terms are misleading and are used when harvest is not the reason for a stocks depleted status. There are, for instance, stocks in the Lower Columbia River that have an extremely high probability of extinction within 50 years with zero harvest levels. The Hatchery Science Review Group (HSRG) has developed a 4H model that attributes impact on stocks to hydroelectric operations, hatcheries, and habitat degradation as well as harvest. In 2002, low rainfall and fish-blocking dams led to an infestation of parasites that killed almost all of the outbound juvenile salmon. This led to an overfishing concern in 2006 even though fishing was not the cause of the problem. Reauthorization of MSA should provide a distinction between overfished and depleted designations.

Flexibility in rebuilding programs:

Due to a predicted low return of Klamath Fall Chinook in 2006, the Pacific Fishery Management Council, with guidance from the National Fishery Management Service, felt constrained to close the fishery. The stock was not endangered; the fishery was closed because the predicted return was below a floor number that would ensure maximum productivity. This closure came on the heels of a greatly reduced fishery in 2005. The result was \$150 million in economic losses and \$60.4 million in disaster relief to commercial and sports fishermen in Oregon and California. Fuel docks, ice plants, and other support services were hurt and some closed. In many coastal communities, fishing is a major source of employment. Without fishing opportunity, there is a significant toll on families, unemployment goes there is increased load on social services, and local governments suffer from lost tax revenue.

This is one example. Salmon fisheries in California, Oregon, and Washington, have experienced many partial or complete closures over the years. Reauthorization of MSA should provide for consideration of social and economic impacts on fishing communities by allowing a phase-in of rebuilding programs over three years.

Annual Catch Limits/International Agreements (ACLs):

The albacore tuna fishery is managed by the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission and the Western/Central Pacific Fishery Commission in addition to the US Fishery Management Councils. Currently foreign countries are increasing their fleets. Establishing unilateral conservation measures

such as ACLs or limited entry will constrain the US fleet while having little to no effect on conserving the resource. If such measures are taken, US representatives to international treaty discussions will have diminished ability to protect US interests. The Councils should have flexibility in deciding the timing and benefit of ACLs on internationally managed stocks. In addition the establishment of an annual catch limit can have significant economic impacts on fishing communities. The Councils should have the ability to take this into consideration when deciding an ACL.

Data Collection:

Collaboration between fishermen and scientists will always benefit data collection opportunities. As an example, in 2007 using disaster relief funds made available to fishermen in Oregon and California, a project was undertaken to collect tissue samples from Chinook salmon which were then analyzed for their genetic markers. The process involves fishermen taking a fin clip sample from fish and recording the GPS coordinates and other measurements. These data are then sent to one of the regional science centers for analysis. Salmon stock returns are currently estimated using the Fishery Resource Allocation Model (FRAM). Inputs to the FRAM are based on coded wire tags. There are several issues with coded wire tags, notably that they apply only to a small percentage of hatchery stocks and no wild stocks. In addition, they are collected when the fish are delivered to a shore-based processor. At-sea collection of GSI samples has shown different distributions of fish stocks than modeled in the FRAM and has the potential to substantially improve management of salmon by shifting effort away from endangered stocks. The MSA Reauthorization Act should be amended to encourage collaborative research.