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**HEARING ON
MAGNUSON-STEVENS FISHERY CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT ACT:
OVERVIEW OF FISHERIES MANAGEMENT SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES**

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

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Chairman Sullivan and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act). It is an honor to provide input on this important topic. While I'm not an expert on the nuances of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, I hope my perspective as someone who has been part of the recreational fishing industry for fifteen years and who is involved in a variety of national efforts focused on the future of the sport can be of value to the subcommittee. I expect many of the other comments provided today will be focused on important fisheries science and management challenges related to the Magnuson-Stevens Act. However, I will focus broadly on trends in recreational fishing as a whole and how federal marine fisheries management fits in.

Federal Marine Fisheries in Context

The American Sportfishing Association (ASA) is the national trade association representing over 800 fishing tackle manufacturers, distributors, retailers, media and other components of the industry who service the 47 million Americans who recreationally fish each year. We are involved in a wide variety of policy and legislative issues affecting the future of the sport, but devote a significant portion of our advocacy efforts on federal marine fisheries management. Considering that 82 percent of all fishing trips occur in freshwater, and of the 18 percent that occur in saltwater, only roughly one tenth occur in federal waters, it may seem counterintuitive to focus so much attention on federal marine fisheries management.

However, the industry sees tremendous growth opportunities in the saltwater fishing market. According to data from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the average cost of a saltwater trip (\$134.88) is approximately twice that of a freshwater trip (\$69.05). While specific estimates are not available comparing offshore to inshore trips, given that offshore trips must be taken from a boat, and that these boats tend to be larger and outfitted with higher-end gear, clearly the economic value

of offshore trips is significant compared to other types of fishing. Substantial economic opportunities for our industry and associated industries exist with offshore recreational fishing, but we are confronted with a management system that for years has been limiting that opportunity.

In contrast, ASA believes that freshwater fisheries management in the U.S. has largely been figured out. While some challenges to freshwater fisheries conservation and access persist – such as invasive species; water quality and quantity; and habitat degradation – from a purely management standpoint, states are generally doing an excellent job of ensuring anglers have reasonable access to healthy fish stocks.

States and the recreational fishing community have a symbiotic relationship, due in part to the states' funding model. Most – and in some cases, all – of the funding for states' fisheries management activities come from anglers in the form of license fees and the excise tax on fishing equipment and motorboat fuel. But the relationship between states and the recreational fishing community is far from just transactionary. States go above and beyond to communicate with anglers, solicit input and work together to ensure anglers are satisfied with their experiences on the water.

Similar close connections exist between the recreational fishing community and many of the federal land management agencies, such as the U.S Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the National Park Service. Despite the occasional disagreement over policy and management issues, in general these agencies are viewed by recreational fishermen as partners working to ensure the conservation of fisheries resources for the use and enjoyment of the public. Unlike state fish and wildlife agencies, these federal land management agencies do not receive direct funding from anglers; yet are still viewed as partners in conservation.

Conversely, NOAA Fisheries is viewed by many in the recreational fishing community as an adversary. While efforts have been made in recent years to improve the dialogue between the agency and anglers and to better understand how to address concerns, anglers have seen little change in the agency's actions and how they translate to fishing opportunities. Fairly or unfairly, the general perception among anglers is that NOAA Fisheries only understands and cares about commercial fishing, dating back to its roots as the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries.

While overfishing is now at an all-time low, in many fisheries (such as the snapper-grouper complex in the southeastern U.S.) that has not translated into improved fishing access for recreational fishermen. This is believed to be a result of a management system that focuses on commercial fisheries management and attempts to apply the same approaches to recreational fishing, without recognizing that these are two fundamentally different activities.

Without question, commercial fishing is tremendously important to the nation by creating jobs and providing a sustainable supply of seafood. My comments and suggestions are not intended to diminish the importance of commercial fishing, but to recognize that recreational fishing is also

important, and can no longer be an afterthought in the way our federal marine fisheries are managed.

Nationwide Focus on R3

In recent years, the recreational fishing community has redoubled efforts to increase participation in recreational fishing nationally. For decades, up until the 1990's, the sport experienced steady growth in participation. However, a variety of societal and demographic changes in the nation have contributed to a generally flat level of participation for the last two decades, despite an increase in the overall U.S. population. Given the social, conservation and economic benefits that recreational fishing provides to the nation, this lack of growth in the sport is a major cause for concern among industry, organizations and fisheries agencies.

Focusing on new and innovative ways to recruit, retain and reactivate (R3) anglers is one of the top priorities of ASA and many partner organizations such as the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, the Association of State Fish and Wildlife Agencies, and many others. The state fish and wildlife agencies are a key partner in this endeavor, as are many of the federal land management agencies, particularly the U.S. Forest Service.

An opportunity exists to include NOAA Fisheries in this effort, but it will require a major shift in how the agency has historically viewed, treated and managed recreational fishing. Early indications from this Administration, including extending the Gulf of Mexico red snapper season and selecting quality recreational fishing representatives for the regional fishery management councils are reason for optimism, but much more work remains to be done. While some of this responsibility is under the agency's control, ASA believes that changes are also needed to the Magnuson-Stevens Act to facilitate better management of marine recreational fisheries and improved opportunities for fishing access.

The Modern Fish Act

The recreational fishing community has articulated the changes it would like to see to the Magnuson-Stevens Act through legislation that has already been introduced in this Congress. On July 10, Senators Roger Wicker (R-Miss.), Bill Nelson (D-Fla.), Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii), John Kennedy (R-La.) and Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) introduced S. 1520, the "Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act of 2017" (Modern Fish Act), which ASA strongly supports. A companion bill, H.R. 2023, was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives on April 6, by Congressmen Garret Graves (R-La.), Gene Green (D-Texas), Daniel Webster (R-Fla.) and Rob Wittman (R-Va.).

The bipartisan Modern Fish Act addresses many of the challenges faced by recreational anglers, including allowing alternative management approaches for recreational fishing, reexamining fisheries allocations, smartly rebuilding fish stocks and improving recreational data collection. The bill would benefit recreational fishing access and conservation. As a community, comprised of thousands of businesses and the millions of customers they serve, we want modern management

approaches, science and technology to guide decision-making.

Since its original passage in 1976 and through subsequent reauthorizations, the Magnuson-Stevens Act has never focused specifically on addressing the unique challenges of federal saltwater recreational fisheries management. We hope Congress will use the current reauthorization process as an opportunity to address this historic inequity. By making the necessary policy and statutory changes that recognize saltwater recreational fishing as an important and distinct activity, Congress and NOAA Fisheries can go a long way toward creating an environment in which saltwater recreational fishing's many benefits to the nation are fully realized.

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